Polyhedron®

NEWSZINE

OCTOBER

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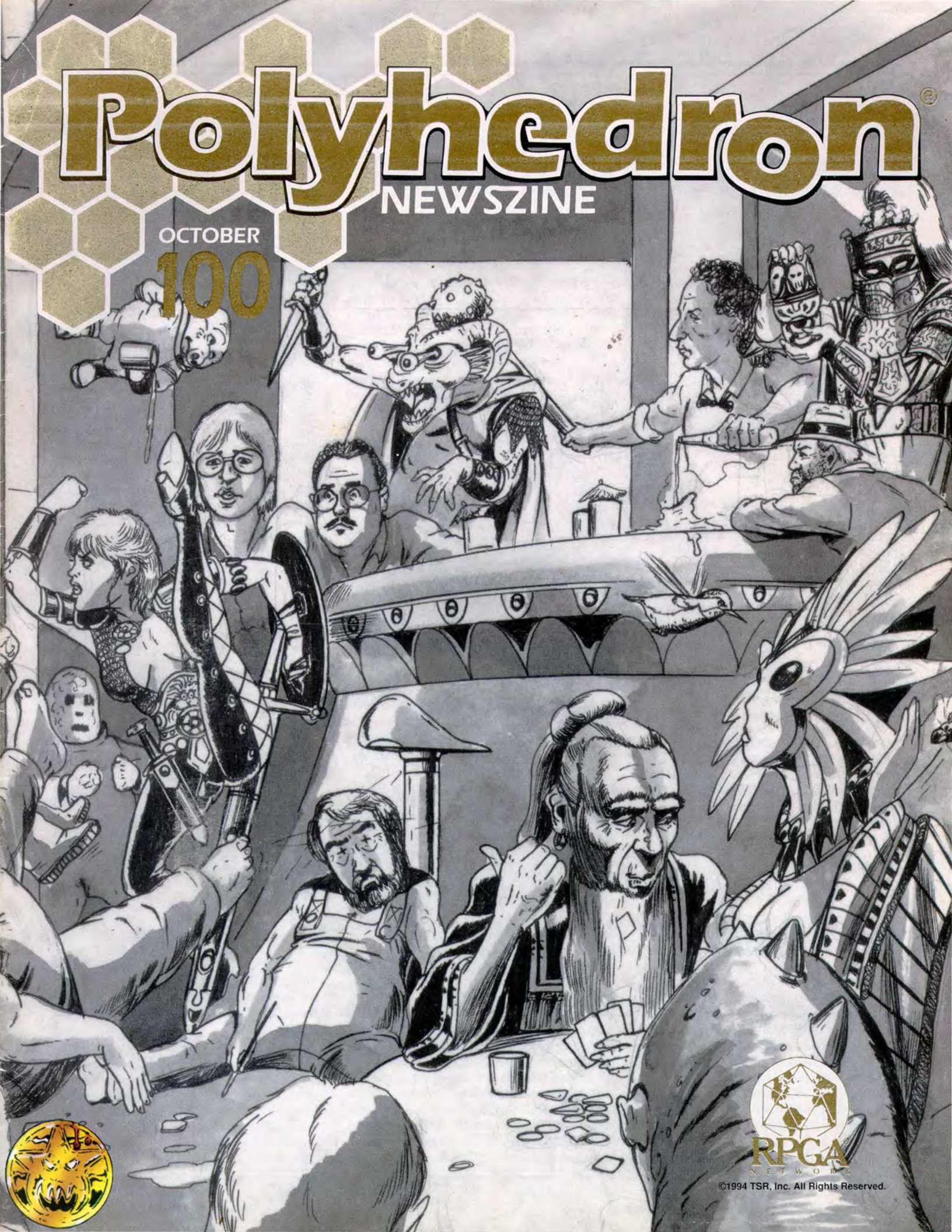

RPGA NETWORK

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Notes From HQ

A Thirty-Two Page Milestone

You hold in your hands a milestone—the 100th issue of the POLYHEDRON® Newszine. In truth, the 100th issue of any magazine is a landmark issue, but we consider *this* 100th issue especially important. This represents your strong devotion to the hobby and the RPGA® Network.

The Network formed in 1980, and the first issue of the Newszine appeared in the summer of 1981. We wouldn't be here 100 issues and 14 years later if it weren't for you.

Today the Network is bigger and stronger than ever.

We proudly boast branches in Cambridge, England at the TSR UK office; Canberra, Australia; and our newest in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

We sponsor tournaments and events at about 200 conventions worldwide.

The Network has more than 120 gaming clubs in the United States, Canada, England, France, and Australia that have from a half-dozen members to a few hundred.

And the Network's members range in age from newborns signed up by their gaming parents to DMs in their 70s.

Some of us are high school students, college professors, doctors, stock clerks, lawyers, secretaries, game designers, engineers, and ministers. Our game masters include a blind man who uses Braille and a talking computer to assist him in running tournaments, and a businessman who puts so much zest and emotion into his sessions that he often brings tears to his players' eyes.

Our players include large families scheduling vacations at conventions and young men who only dabble in games because English is a second language and they don't want to be embarrassed by saying the wrong things.

We are a Network of diverse and unique individuals, truly a cross-section of society. But we all have one thing in common: we love games. Having a good time is important to us. And making friends around a gaming table is high on our list of priorities. We also have in common this very special issue of the Newszine—which is filled with features you won't find in other publications. The Newszine staff has no intention of reprinting these articles, so we have every confidence this issue will become as much of a collector's item as our other landmark issues—#1 and #50 (with its full-color Jeff Easley cover).

In the early years of the Network, the Newszine was called RPGA News, though it didn't say that on the cover (you had to look in the legal copy on the inside). It had the TSR and RPGA logos on the front with the world-die between them. That die has been one of the few constants through the years and remains on the cover to this day.

The early issues were only 16 pages and came out quarterly. However, shortly thereafter, the magazine went bi-monthly. We've reprinted the covers of the first two issues here.

Issue #1 contained an interview with Gary Gygax, features on the BOOT HILL®, original TOP SECRET®, D&D®, Dawn Patrol, and GAMMA WORLD® games, and an article about tournament scoring.

It also offered a question-and-answer column called *Dispel Confusion*, where members sought the answers to their most-stumping game situations. Harold Johnson (one of TSR's formost experts on just about any game) provided the answers. Here's one of those questions from that long-ago issue: *"Q: Can paladins become lycanthropes? Are they immune to all disease? A: Paladins are indeed immune to all forms of disease. Unfortunately for them, lycanthropy is as much a curse as it is a disease. The DMG uses an example of a paladin contracting lycanthropy and also mentions* cure disease *and* remove curse *as ways of eliminating it.—HJ"*

Gamers' questions have gotten much more complex through the years, and many of those queries have appeared in Sage Advice in our sister publication, DRAGON® Magazine.

For old time's sake, let's take a look back and do one more *Dispel Confusion* column. Harold, now a creative director for the DRAGONLANCE® and RAVENLOFT® lines, has said he would answer those questions we select to print.

We'll look at all the letters, see which ones strike our fancies, and we'll reward those who pen—in our opinion—the best questions. First place: Issues #1 and #2 of RPGA News. Yep, the two issues pictured on this page. They're certainly collector items, commanding good prices at conventions. They're in mint condition, and they're waiting for a good home. We reserve the right to award additional prizes, such as T-shirts, modules, and whatever else is sitting around our offices.

However, before you take up that challenge and put your questions on paper, read through the rest of this issue. We're especially proud of this one.

Here's to 100 more,

Jean

Jean

❑

About the Cover
Artist James Holloway aptly penned his rendition of a celebration over our 100th issue. The Network member who creates the most interesting AD&D® Game NPC from among the characters pictured will win the original piece of art. Deadline: December 15, 1994. Best of luck!

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If your mailing label reads
"Exp 10.94"
this is your last issue.
Renew today!

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Polyhedron® NEWSZINE

Volume 15, Number 10
Issue #100

SPECIAL FEATURES

4 Lightning Strike—by Margaret Weis and Don Perrin
A hoax? Or a message crucial to the survival of the Armies of the Lance?

5 The Tyaonon Ranger—by Bill Smith
The previous owner was an old Sullustan who flew it only on holidays. Yeah, that's the ticket.

6 Analects of Sigil—by David "Zeb" Cook What's to lose if you visit citadels of the inner planes?

8 The Cult Of The Great Hunter—by Louis J. Prosperi
A new menace for FASA's Earthdawn setting arises.

9 Gorlash Spacescum—by Tom Prusa
Let this villain for the SPELLJAMMER® setting muscle his way into your game.

10 The Tower of Gold—by Nicky Rea Try this adventure for a glorious quest in the Land of Fate.

12 Insect Labs Incorporated—by Wolfgang Baur
Some organizations are so efficient they can't be allowed to exist.

14 Conspired To Succeed—by Alex Iwanow Here are new professions for Dark Conspiracy players.

16 A Squid's Eye View—by Bruce Heard
A mind flayer's peek at Mystara is a study of magic and twists of fate.

20 Kre'ketrac—by Bill Slavicsek An item from Athas' past is unearthed in the recent cataclysm.

22 Crimebuster—by Monte Cook
Take a glance at a modern superhero with all the charm and sensibilities of the Golden Age.

24 Arms Against The Dragonlords—by Edward Gioffre
These powerful new weapons can be used against the forces of darkness on the world of Krynn.

26 Shadowrun Archetypes—by Tom Dowd Add some character to your next Shadowrun game.

28 Pumpkin-Charley—by J. Robert King Weird! Weird! Weird!

30 Alien Technology—by Ed Stark Be careful of this gizmo for the Shatterzone setting.

31 Troubleshooter Exam—by Bill Ohlmsdale Failure means death.

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Lightning Strike

The Shadow of a New War

by Margaret Weis and Don Perrin

(text deleted for brevity) . . . .

My Lord, little can be made of the accounts of the pickpocket and thief Vlemtor. On the odd chance that something of value can be made of his tale, I have included the document that he claims to have stolen from an "evil spy," as he puts it. It is obviously a forgery, created solely for profit.

OPERATION LIGHTNING STRIKE
Orders—3rd Quadron, 1st Strike Army

Situation: Friendly Forces
◆ The forces of the Dark Queen are in good order. All fighting units report high readiness. This Quadron is prepared for extended operations of 96 hours without resupply or reinforcement.

Enemy Forces
◆ The forces of Ansalon are in decay. Fighting between various groups of humans, elves and dwarves ensures that no overwhelming threat will be faced. The only organized organization of military might in the north of the continent is the Knights of Solamnia. Their tactics are outmoded, and their organization is brittle. Still, they should not be underestimated.

No detachments. Two squadrons of Blue Dragons (Lighning Flash Squadron and Electric Doom Squadron) will be attached for Quadron Air Cover. They also will be used to ferry the First and Second Wings, Eighth Shield, to their Landing Zones north of Valkinord.

Mission
◆ The Third Quadron will capture and hold Valkinord so that the armies of the Dark Queen may land unopposed.

Execution
◆ The Blue Dragon Squadrons will reconnoiter the beach landing site at dawn, 24th Thirdmonth, 366. They will land, unload the First and Second Wings, Eighth Shield, near the beach. They will fly air cover for the landing. If opposition is sighted, they will procede to engage the enemy. If the site is clear, they will remain in the area.
◆ The Quadron will land at 0800hrs. The Quadron will go south to Valkinord, destroying any opposition in its path. It will be at the outskirts of Valkinord by 1700hrs. By 0800hrs the following day, the Quadron will hold the port areas and surrounding settlement.
◆ Valkinord poses problems because of its ruins. The new city settlement's inhabitants could use the ancient walled defenses, but a swift attack by the Quadron should reduce the risk of this.
◆ This operation will cease, and then *Operation Rolling Thunder*, the final conquest of the Solamnic Plain, the High Clerist's Tower and Palanthas, will commence once the remaining units of the First Strike Army (First, Eighth and Ninth Quadrons) have landed at the port of Valkinord. The Second, Third and Fifth Strike Armies will land over the next three days, assembling the largest, best equipped, and best trained military force ever to have graced the Continent of Ansalon, and all for the glory of the Dark Queen.

Groupings and Tasks
◆ All Shield tasks will be outlined in the Quadron Battle Plan. During the conquest of Valkinord, the two Blue Dragon Squadrons will patrol the areas inland of Valkinord. If any opposition is encountered, the First and Second Wings will engage by land, supported by the two Squadrons. The Seventh Shield will be on standby at the West end of the city ruins. Should the reconnaisance force become engaged, the Shield will destroy the opposition.

Coordination and Movement
◆ The Quadron's lead elements will cross the start line at 0300hrs, 24th Thirdmonth, 366. The last element will cross by 0400hrs. The ships *Dauntless* and *Devestator* will land the main Quadron force by the timings stated. The Blue Dragon Squadrons, with the First and Second Wings, Eighth Shield, will launch by 0400 to be in position on the beach by their stated timings.

Order of March
◆ The Quadron's Order of March will be as per the Quadron's Battle Plan.

Action on Contact
◆ If any unit is engaged, it will close with and destroy the enemy, using all necessary firepower and mobility. All units supported by a Gray Robe will send word via ether messenger to Quadron Headquarters. All units not so supported will immediately send a runner, regardless of size of enemy contact.

Magic State
◆ All units are to be "Top High," or prepared for all enemy magic interference. All mages and clerics must be on alert for the presence of enemy magic use. Should such use be detected, Mages are NOT to engage, but to send word to Quadron Headquarters. The Quadron Mage Warfare (Thorn) Compgroup will counter any magical threat.

Priority of Targets
◆ All opposition from enemy magical sources must maintain first priority. These must be destroyed with minimal delay. Flying units, especially Dragon equipped units, will be next on the priority list. Knights of Solamnia follow, then other military forces encountered.

Dress / Equipment / Weapons
◆ Uniform dress will be as per Quadron written standing orders of . . . .

(Rest of document has been burned.)

As you can see, My Lord, this is pure rubbish. To admit this level of organization and training by the forces of Evil seems to be a child's playtime story. We know that evil turns upon itself, making this sort of document a pure fantasy. And those remarks about the Knights, My Lord . . . I nearly slew the forger myself in rage. Thanks be to Paladine that I have been trained in the arts of self control and mercy. My regards to you and the Knights at the Whitestone Glade.

Sir Donald, Knight of the Crown
Commander, North Keep

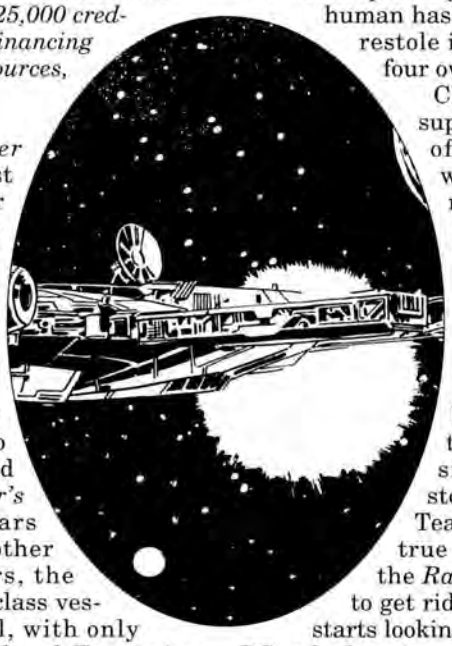
❑

The Tyaonon Ranger

A Fast Ship For *Star Wars* Campaigns

by Bill Smith

"Just take a look at this, fellows. This beautiful ship, known as the Tyaonon Ranger, *has barely 10,000 light years on her. The last owner was a quiet Sullustan trader who traveled the Outer Rim trade routes. Oh, those armored hull plates and blaster cannons are purely for show. Never damaged, never fired on . . . a beautiful ship in excellent condition. I'll let you have it for only 25,000 credits, and I can arrange financing through a number of sources, my good friends. . . ."*



The *Tyaonon Ranger* appears to be a modest freighter, but closer inspection reveals a fast, heavily armed ship ready for action. In other words, the *Ranger* is truly a smuggler's (or Rebel's) dream.

Even a dedicated starship aficionado would be hard-pressed to identify the *Ranger's* make. While it appears similar to countless other light stock freighters, the Mandalorian Stathas-class vessel was experimental, with only nine ships actually produced. True to its namesake, a sleek, venomous reptile from the Mandalore system, the stathas uses a harmless appearance to hide its deadly capabilities. The ship can challenge the Empire's TIE fighters with its quad lasers, while being tough enough to take a harsh beating from the weapons found on even the most modern starfighters.

The history of the *Tyaonon Ranger* is worth noting (and no doubt will come back to haunt any individuals "lucky" enough to buy or inherit the vessel). Recently, the ship was owned and operated by a Twi'lek spice smuggling ring—and all fingers quickly point to Bib Fortuna as the being behind it; no doubt, Jabba the Hutt is involved as well. This particular ring came crashing down when a Phraetiss system patrol cruiser seized the vessel, taking the crew into custody. Mysteriously, the vessel disappeared from the system's impound yards within days of being logged in.

The planetary governor's only lead is a mysterious human who was spotted near the years just after the *Ranger* first arrived: he is solidly built and smells of armudu spice. Apparently, this crafty human has sold the ship to (and restole it from) no less than four owners.

Characters making a superficial investigation of the ship's history will find a "clean" record, but if they bother to check far back to the second latest owner, they will learn she is a non-existent person. In other words, the ship's records have been falsified, and they are probably considering buying a stolen ship. The seller, Tealo, has no idea of the true value (or history) of the *Ranger*—he just wants to get rid of it before someone starts looking closely.

PCs who buy (or somehow acquire) the Ranger will soon learn that Bib Fortuna's (and thus, Jabba's) enforcers are looking to reclaim the vessel: there is a large smuggling compartment in the accessway to the escape pot, and it still has 40,000 credits worth of spice hidden in it.

Their lives will be complicated by the four prior "owners" who are all eager to reclaim "their" ship from unscrupulous "thieves" (that would be the PCs).

The *Tyaonon Ranger* is a perfect ship for beginning or experienced PCs, and it is suitable for convention adventures and tournaments as well.

With all the "guest stars" that can be crammed into an adventure, players will be guaranteed a memorable *Star Wars* adventure or campaign. ❑

Mandal Motors Mandalorian Statha-Class Freighter

Craft: Modified Mandal Motors
Type: Modified Smuggling Vessel
Scale: Starfighter
Length: 29 meters
Skill: Transports: Mandalorian Hunter
Crew: 2, gunners: 2, skeleton: 1/+5
Crew Skill: Varies
Passengers: 8
Cargo Capacity: 110 metric tons
Consumables: 2 months
Cost: Not available for sale
Hyperdrive Multiplier: x1
Hyperdrive Backup: x15
Nav Computer: Yes
Maneuverability: 1D+2
Space: 6
Atmosphere: 330; 950 kmh
Hull: 5D
Shields: 2D

Sensors:
Passive: 2D/0D
Scan: 3D/1D
Search: 6D/2D
Focus: 4D/3D+2

Weapons:
Quad Laser Cannon
Fire Arc: Turret
Crew: 1
Skill: Starship gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Space Range: 1–3/12/25
Atmosphere: 100–300/1.2/2.5 km
Damage: 5D
Proton Torpedo Launcher
Fire Arc: Turret
Crew: 1
Skill: Starship gunnery
Fire Control: 2D
Space Range: 1/3/7
Atmosphere: 30–100/300/700
Damage: 9D

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The Analects of Sigil

The Five Citadels of the PLANESCAPE™ Setting

By David "Zeb" Cook

The confession of late Handulus, scholar of the 3rd rank, as extracted by Jerak of the Mercykillers before appointed witnesses.

There's no need for pain. I understand the laws in these things and I will make the statement you desire. My confession will, however, be useless—you'll see.

I imagine you'll find some cause to put me in the dead book quickly. Fortunately, what I'm about to tell you has already been filed in the *Great Dictum*. With the fools' quest for knowledge, they'll find my account in some future cycle, and then it'll begin to destroy them from within.

Understand that I hold no animosity against you, Mercykiller. Your zeal to the letter of your duty is admirable. When I'm dead, I will not haunt you.

You seek answers to two questions, though you only ask one. Your first one is simple—Did I kill Jeron, factor of the Governors? Your second question, although you haven't asked it, is not nearly so simple—Why did I abandon my rank and status among the Governors to become a foot soldier in the Doomguard? Let me answer the first, and the second may become clear.

Did I kill Jeron? No, but yes. Did I strike him with a knife, or poison his food? No, I did nothing against him. All I did was direct his studies to a path certain to bring him to his doom. I think he deserved it. It was perfect; for years he lived off my efforts, stealing the credit for my work and putting his name to my pages of the *Great Dictum*. It was only fitting that now my research would kill him.

As a Governor, my specialty was the citadels of the Inner Planes, specifically those of the Positive and Negative Planes. They are fascinating places, believe me. You've heard, I'm sure, of the citadels of dust and ash—or of the towers of salt where the Doomguard meet. But there are other citadels, too, citadels that never existed in the long memories of men.

I first got peery of these fortresses from some hints I found in the *Grand Dictum*. It was a stroke of mute faith that I found a single page from the *Codex of Infinite Planes*. Oh, I was careful and respectful of the work; I knew the tales of the Codex and what it would do to a berk. The *Great Dictum* is full of lore that cost its researchers grimly. I wasn't a complete addlecove; my instructors at the Courts had it clear and minded me of many dangers.

They loved to tell us tales of things like Schalgtar's last entry on the dream-snakes of Elysium in the *Great Dictum*, and how they poured illusions into his mind. This tale made a particular impact upon me, though I did not know why at the time. Now I understand it all, of course: the dream-snakes had influenced me through Schalgtar's words. Their power comes not just in their confrontation, but even in the discovery of their existence. Their influence on me was meant to be a warning, I sincerely believe, a caution for what I was about to discover. There were other warnings—strangers standing at the window, misplaced thoughts, and candles that refused to burn down—but I was determined to rise in rank and establish my first entries into the *Great Body of Knowledge* that is our goal.

The page I found described a pattern of structures, buildings that stand at a certain angle, whose floors are spaced to the dimensions of the sounds that must fill them, and are set on the orrery of the Inner Planes in just a particular pattern. The page was incomplete; it showed only a part of the sketch map to the towers. Never once was the purpose of all this explained.

It was a beginning, and I could see my success already stretched before me. So I went out to the citadels, which is a dark every Cager ought to know. There's a host of towers, forts, caverns, redoubts, and some spires out there that a faction or another'll claim as theirs, but there's a vast difference between all these things and the true citadels that I sought.

I won't distress you with the petty details of my journey or the months of searching that took me through the hells of the Inner Planes. The things that happened to me are inconsequential, the wounds and wonders of all travelers. It is the citadels that matter—the Five Citadels of Surrender.

Four of the citadels are spaced on the ring of the Negative Plane. Each sits alone and isolated, built of a substance much like the better-known citadels of Ash and Salt, although the Citadels of Surrender are much different in form.

On the plane of Salt stands, or better said, plunges, the Great Mine. You can best see it as a scraped sore of a huge salt dig. That's the form it's taking right now outside the door. The pit's sides drip crusted waves of salt; floral crystals glint in the black aura of the Negative Plane. At the very heart stands a splintered column. I reached it by winding down paths, while creatures of salt scurried like geckos from my way.

At the center of the Great Mine, you perform the first of the Great Surrenders. A common man would imagine an eye or a hand lost for knowledge, but that is not so here. In the Great Mine, you give away fear—your memories of it, the taste of it, even the energies it feeds you. Your fear slips away to become one of the little creatures on the path.

The second citadel I visited stands in the Plane of Ash. There it looks like nothing more than twining columns of swirling grit, crushing each other, a tangled skein of razor-vine wrapped around the balcony's rail. This one, I knew from the Codex, was surely the Embracing Tower. Up its powdery stairs I climbed, pushing aside curtains of soot. The cindered floors tore my shoes and left my feet pads of scars. I thrust my arm into the smoky oculus at the top and felt the second of my surrenders. Hope boiled out of me like fat from a sausage, flowing in rivulets down the stairs. I no longer cared for tomorrow or feared its coming.

The third citadel was the hardest to imagine. It drifted through the plane of Vacuum, an insubstantial wisp where nothing and something defined the Invisible Labyrinth. I wandered for days, maybe weeks, through its invisible halls, tracing the lace of breezes that showed me where to go. Finally, at the center was a fountain of nothing. I bathed in it and was washed clean of all compassion, drained away into the void.

The fourth and last citadel I visited sprawled across the Plane of Dust. It had no walls or rooms or towers. That was only a pattern traced out on the powder like a sand-painting. Where I had wandered weeks in the Labyrinth, I struggled months here, for the pattern followed itself in ways that could not be drawn. Vainly I searched for a center as I had found in all the others. It was only when I reached the beginning once more that I realized I had lost all remorse. With each step, the pattern had pulled a little from me, and I left behind the footprints of my regrets and sorrows.

By now I knew that I was being refashioned, but for what purpose I still cannot imagine. Whoever built these citadels, or what their true function is a point of research I will never discover. But you have arrested me, and I think will convict me, even though I did not raise a hand against poor Jeron.

It offends your sense of justice too much to let me go. I think the Governors, too, will work the courts against me, as revenge for giving them the laugh. I don't care. There's nothing left in me to care. That's why I became a Bleaker.

And that's how I killed Jeron, you see. There are five Citadels of Surrender. I went only to four, and look at me. To kill Jeron, all I had to do was let him see my papers and notebooks. Not all, mind; I left out important parts, like what it'll cost. He's a cross-trading thief, but he's still a dedicated Governor. He'll visit all five—the four I saw, and the one that remains at the center, in the Negative Plane. Who knows? The sod might even live through that, but he'll be dead anyway. No fear, sorry, mercy, or hope—what's there left after giving up all that?

❑

Cult Of The Great Hunter

A Menace for the Earthdawn Setting

by Louis J. Prosperi

—From a letter to King Varulus III of Throal from Ardinn Tero, Scholar of the Library of Throal, 1506

To his Royal Highness Varulus the Third, King of Throal,

As you know, the land of Barsaive is home to many different secret societies. Some, such as the Lightbearers, serve the people of Barsaive by using the magic of the Great Pattern of the Universe to combat the effects of the Scourge that remain in our world. There are also the "living legend" cults, groups such as the Seekers of the Heart, which hope one day to restore the former beauty of the Blood Wood, and the Wielders of Purifier, who seek the legendary sword *Purifier*, forged before the Scourge as a weapon to be wielded against the Horrors.

Lastly, there are other groups that are best defined simply as cults, groups whose members are fiercely devoted to their own unique ends.

Hidden among these cults are others that represent a much greater potential danger to the world. These are the Horror cults, cults whose members devote their lives to serving one or more of the astral abominations that ravaged our world during the Scourge.

I believe many of these Horror cults are simply manifestations of the overactive imaginations of Barsaive's Scourge-worn people. Still, one such cult poses a significant threat to the land and cannot be ignored. I refer to the Cult of the Great Hunter, also known as Those of the Great Hunter, a cult which serves the Horror known as Verjigorm, the Hunter of Great Dragons.

We know of this Horror's existence only from tales told by the great dragons Icewing and Mountainshadow.

It is said that Verjigorm hunted great dragons during the previous Scourge, though the Horror has not yet been seen during this most recent Scourge. As to the veracity of these claims, I have chosen not to doubt publicly the words of one such as Icewing or Mountainshadow. Whether you follow my examples is not my province but yours.

One recently revealed incident that relates to the cult of Verjigorm comes from a scholar Named Tiabdjin the Knower. Tiabdjin recently delivered to us a manuscript describing in detail many of Barsaive's creatures, both mundane and magical.

This tome relates the experiences of a dragon Named Vasdenjas, who has graciously chosen to share his knowledge of Barsaive's creatures with us Name-givers. According to this text, Verjigorm, or at least the cult that follows Verjigorm, may be responsible for the death of the dragon Thermail.

According to Vasdenjas' tale of the creation of the hydra, a magician, most probably a nethermancer, created that foul creature from a clutch of dragon eggs Thermail had laid. This tale claims that when Thermail discovered that the nethermancer had created the hydra from her young, the dragon impaled herself upon one of the spires of the Delaris Mountains, which has since been known as Wyrmspire. If this tale is true, it is likely that Thermail in fact fell victim to Verjigorm and the Cult of the Great Hunter.

While Vasdenjas' tale makes no direct mention of the Hunter of Great Dragons, many specifics of the tale match certain characteristics attributed to the Cult of the Great Hunter. The most common element in all such stories is the abomination of a clutch of dragon eggs at the hands of a Name-giver. Certainly, such incidents are rare indeed—aside from the Cult of the Great Hunter, only the Therans seem bold enough to act against a great dragon, and even they would show reluctance to do so. (The well-known tale of Jaron and the Sphinx describes the last confirmed incident of dragon/Theran conflict, one decidedly won by the dragons.)

Fortunately, the Cult of the Great Hunter lacks any true organization. All existing evidence points to the cult as being made up of many small groups, each working independently. There is no hierarchy to this cult; instead, each group works in its own way to serve its master's ends.

Nearly every small group of the Cult of the Great Hunter is led by a nethermancer, who uses the magic of life and death at his or her command to serve Verjigorm. The Cult of the Great Hunter also counts among its member adepts of other Disciplines, including warriors, beastmaster, elementalists, and others. I have also heard rumors that questors of the Mad Passion Raggok count themselves among the cult's members, but I seriously doubt these claims—obviously, the Mad Passions would balk at playing tribute to a Horror, nor would they allow their questors to offer such devotion to a being other than themselves.

Many of the activities attributed to the Cult of the Great Hunter may appear to have little connection to Verjigorm but, in fact, most of the activities perpetrated by this cult take the form of indirect action against dragons, such as the theft of dragon eggs and assaults on known allies and servants of the great dragons. While Verjigorm may be able to confront great dragons face to face, his servants are Name-givers, and few Name-givers feel bold enough to confront a great dragon directly.

I have heard tales of incidents reminiscent of the Cult of the Great Hunter from all parts of Barsaive. Recently, however, we have received numerous reports of such activity along the border between the Badlands and the Servos Jungle. A careful study of the activity in this area implies that is all the work of a single group, as many of the reported incidents have similar methods of execution, but the truth of this matter remains a mystery.

While I admit that the information that I have to offer is based on hearsay and second-hand rumor, I must also state for the record that I am convinced that the Cult of the Great Hunter exists. I believe that the Kingdom of Throal must not stand idly by, content to insist that this cult poses no danger to Barsaive. I urge you to take action toward ridding our land of this plague.

Your most humble servant,

Ardin Tero
Scholar of the Great Library of Throal

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Gorlash Spacescum

A Villain For SPELLJAMMER® Campaigns

By Tom Prusa

I tell you Cap'n, it were the strangest thing—an old galley, wallowed in space like a scow. But when we tried to close, she let off with fireballs 'n lightning so we was near burnt to a crisp. I don't know what rides that old scow, but steer clear of the ship flying the Three Fists pennant!

Many are the strange crews in space, but few are stranger than the crew of the pirate Gorlash. Preying on shipping in the known spheres, Gorlash and his crew of the Three Fists have begun to earn a reputation far exceeding that expected of a ship captained by a kobold.

Gorlash Spacescum
8th/9th level kobold (shaman)

STR: 11
DEX: 14
CON: 10
INT: 18
WIS: 17
CHA: 11
AC: 1
Hit Points: 36
Alignment: Lawful Evil
THAC0: 16
Age: 50
Height: 3' 1"
Weight: 71
Hair/Eyes: None/Grey
Weapon Proficiencies: Club, javelin, dagger, sling, darts, punching
Nonweapon Proficiencies: Space fighting, swimming (11), healing (18), herbalism (18), spellcraft (18), read/write Common, Dwarven
Languages: Common, Kobold, Orcish, Dwarvish
Magical Items: *Staff of the magi, ring of protection +3, cloak of protection +3, ioun stone—regeneration, brooch of shielding, wand of frost*
Spells: Priest 6/6/3/2/1, Mage 4/3/2/2

Disability: Gorlash has a third arm growing from the center of his chest. He has had this a long time and is able to attack with it or use it to hold his *staff of the magi* while still casting spells.

Gorlash Spacescum was not always a pirate and thief. He began his career as a human mage on Toril, but he had the misfortune to attempt to *polymorph* himself into a raven—during the Time of Troubles. The resulting wild magic surge left him like this, a three-armed kobold. Needless to say, he was not pleased. The incident also left Gorlash with an unreasoning fear of ravens. It is said among his crew (but quietly), that a raven chased him into space.

Gorlash's fall into evil was complete when he met the lich Bothar, whom Gorlash soon called Master. He served the lich for years, gaining power as a priest of Gaknulak, kobold demigod of trickery. He regained his freedom when a raven flew into the room while he was carrying a staff to his master. He panicked and screamed "Raven!"—which was the command word for a *plane shift* effect from the *staff of the magi*. He sent the lich . . . somewhere. Gorlash now found himself the owner of a horde of magic and treasure, but he refused to stay. Instead he gathered as many of his kobold tribe as would follow and fled the world using a spelljamming helm that Bothar had discovered, but had never used. Gorlash quickly learned the ways of Wildspace and has been comfortable in it ever since.

Gorlash's crew is an odd assortment. Serving him are 25 kobolds of his tribe, all armed with cutlasses and heavy crossbows, 15 orcs, two lizard men, and three humans. Two kobold shamans of Gaknulak provide spelljamming power. Gorlash's commander of troops is Sergeant-Major Prijat, a giff of truly impeccable dress and manners. Major Prijat is a Lawful Neutral 7th level fighter. He simply adores guns and combat—any kind of combat. Gorlash inadvertently saved the Major's life when he first came into space, and Prijat vowed to serve him forever. Gorlash isn't exactly pleased about this, but he has grown to like the big giff. He particularly likes the way Prijat interposes himself between Gorlash and any attackers.

Prijat has actually been a calming influence on Gorlash. They argue about it often, but Prijat refuses to fire on ships that have surrendered, insists on letting prisoners go, and generally makes Gorlash practice his piracy in a civilized fashion. On the other hand, in combat Prijat grants no mercy. He fights like a whirlwind in front of Gorlash.

Gorlash's other strange entity on the spelljamming ship is Floyd, an intelligent (reasonably) shambling mound. Floyd was originally bound to a bard in Cormyr, but Gorlash slew the bard while the shambler was elsewhere. When Floyd returned, Gorlash convinced him that he was Floyd's old master, only in a different form.

Floyd is not too bright (Int 6, which makes him a genius—for a shambling mound). Floyd also speaks Dwarvish, courtesy of a *girdle of dwarvenkind* located somewhere inside him. Since Gorlash is the only other one on the crew to speak Dwarvish, Floyd hasn't figured out that he isn't Floyd's old master. Floyd insists on calling Gorlash by his old master's name, Buck.

Floyd is easily healed by *shocking grasps* and *lightning bolts*, although Gorlash is careful how he uses them. A side effect of the magic that made Floyd intelligent also limits the size to which he can grow.

If Floyd grows to more than 20 HD, he splits into two shamblers. One of them retains his intelligence, the other is merely a normal shambling mound. If this split happens during combat, the new shambler immediately turns on Gorlash. This has happened only once, but once was enough.

Gorlash need not necessarily be an enemy. He is a smart opponent and will not attack a ship that obviously has him outgunned.

He is a fierce opponent of the elves, but he fears them almost as much as he does ravens.

When dealing with elves or giff, he lets Prijat do most of the talking. When dealing with dwarves, he always has Floyd by his side, since Floyd's Charisma is 18 to dwarves. Gorlash is very much a "live to fight another day" pirate.

❑

The Tower Of Gold

A Short Adventure For The AL-QADIM® Setting

by Nicky Rea

Riches beyond imagination and perils unknown await those who seek the golden tower in the ruins of the Ivory Hand. Be swift if you would claim this treasure for your own!

So speaks the message ring the PCs discover among their most recently acquired treasures. The map wrapped around the gold and ruby ring shows the route to the ruin in the mountains and reveals the ring's password, "yaed" (hand).

This is a short adventure outline for up to six characters of any levels. It is intended that the DM flesh out details such as the maps and the NPCs' statistics. Monsters can be found in either the *Monstrous Manual*™ or the AL-QADIM MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® supplement. The DM should customize this scenario, add encounters or treasure, and enrich the basic storyline with subplots or complications. The Genie's Curse is the story behind the adventure and may be told to the PCs if they successfully complete the quest. The four encounters should be used in order and form the basis of the scenario.

The Genie's Curse

Once a noted citadel located high in the mountains above the desert, Baelaed Yaed'aeg (the city of the Ivory Hand) long ago fell into ruin—the result of an offended djinni noble's curse. It was laid upon raqi Husam Ibn Hatim, a sorcerer of wind and flame, because of his mistreatment of captive djinn and his insatiable greed. The curse stated:

Your city shall wither and die. Your children, the jewels of your heart, shall remain alone and friendless, never aging, but unable to depart from a tower of gold that I shall build from your hoarded riches. There they shall remain until such time as brave and clever heroes set them free. Three tests shall there be—one for each daughter. Should they triumph, the heroes shall be rewarded with riches unimaginable.

Realizing his folly, and unable to lift the curse of so powerful a being, the sorcerer could do naught but send forth magical rings, each imbued with a message designed to entice heroes to rescue his three beautiful daughters. Alas, all were ignored, destroyed, or lost. One hundred years passed. The city now lies in ruins, the heroes who would have sought the treasure have long been dust, and the sad maidens of the golden tower have waited in vain—until now. For now, the last ring has imparted its message to a group of heroes worthy of the challenge.

The Old Man

After crossing the desert (and experiencing any encounters the DM wishes to add), the PCs find the landmark indicated on the map. Though almost eradicated by time and sandstorms, an old trail leads up into the mountains, twisting into switchbacks as it climbs ever higher. At one of the most precarious points, where the road is wide enough for only one horse to pass, and a sheer drop-off of three hundred feet awaits the clumsy, an old man in dirty rags blocks the way.

"Most noble travelers, have you any small bits of food—and perhaps a magical gift you are willing to give a poor old beggar?" he whines piteously.

The PCs should generously give him food and water, as this shows charity. They may be less willing to part with a magical item, but that is his price for allowing them unhindered passage. Though he appears defenseless and feeble, he is actually the noble djinni who laid the curse. If the party protests, he hints at "treasures unimaginable" to be had for the price of but a single magical item. If they refuse, he uses his whirlwind to damage or blow away most of their equipment and/or animals, bids them think upon the perils of greed, and leaves them to proceed onward.

Sharifah

As they near the city, the PCs clearly see a broad road leading directly to a dazzling tower of gold. A swordsman clad in desert robes, keffiyah, and facecloth stands upon the twisting stairs which lead up to the entrance to the tower.

He does not speak, but as the PCs climb the stairs and near the elaborately decorated window set into the tower behind him, he raises his hands. Searing flames take the shape of a glowing scimitar and dance in place before him.

"Who shall meet the challenge of my blade? Any who seeks to pass must defeat it alone; none may help. Each must overcome the test, or none shall pass," the swordsman whispers.

This is actually Sharifah, eldest daughter of the sorcerer and a practitioner of great talent herself. The flaming sword is AC 0, has 20 hit points, and inflicts 1d8 damage plus another 1d4 from flame. It can be defeated either through swordplay or by dousing it with water. Once it has been doused, however, water will not extinguish it again. Other clever methods of defeating or bypassing the sword should have a chance of working as well.

Sharifah herself is invulnerable so long as she remains within or upon the tower. She cannot be removed from the tower until the tests have been successfully completed. If the PCs seek to overpower her or get through the window, they find that she cannot be harmed or moved, and that the apparently open window is blocked by an inpenetrable force field. Any PC who looks closely at the window notices the figure lurking within the tower. This is Lateefah watching the outcome of the sword fight. Once each PC has fought the sword, all may continue up the stairs. Sharifah disappears.

Ruqayyah

At the top of the stairs is an impressive golden door. The "door" will not open regardless of the PCs' actions, as it is false. When the PCs reach it, the door speaks, saying, "Reveal your greatest desire and your greatest fear to pass."

Ruqayyah, the second daughter, sits on the tower's roof hidden by the dome and by her sister Sharifah's *invisibility* spell. She uses a *potion of ventriloquism*

to make it seem as though the door is talking. Ruqayyah is a hakima and can hear the truth in spoken words. She can tell if and when the PCs lie.

If they do so, the "door" says, "You have not told the truth. Until you do so, you may not pass."

The DM should ask each player if his or her character is telling the truth. If a player claims something as a character's greatest fear, this should be enforced later in the scenario.

Once each PC has truthfully replied, a secret door five steps behind the party swings open. As with her sister, Ruqayyah is invulnerable, and she moves inside behind the party once they enter.

Lateefah

This is actually a series of encounters which the DM should customize for his players. Using the information gained by Ruqayyah as a guideline (Lateefah, the youngest daughter and most powerful wizard) and her sisters create a phantasmic maze of true and illusionary traps and foes for the PCs to overcome.

There should be at least one special encounter designed for each PC in the party.

These should create confusion and challenge the party. Suggestions include: using *guards and wards* to baffle the PCs as to their true direction, creating illusionary monsters or events which reflect the characters' fears, and utilizing a pictographic combination lock which triggers traps or deals damage for incorrect combinations.

The DM is encouraged to be as inventive and challenging as possible, while not turning the tower into an automatic death trap.

The PCs should be able to overcome the obstacles and pass the tests through intelligence and skill.

Special Notes

The NPCs and the tower itself are invulnerable to physical and magical attacks because the tower is in a pocket dimension, and magical entry or scrying into it fail without harm to the PCs. *Detect magic* is inaccurate here, giving wildly fluctuating results.

As in an *Arabian Nights* tale, all the magical effects need not be explained. Doing so reduces the wonder inherent in the scenario.

Ending the Tests

If the PCs triumph, the sisters appear and offer themselves as wives or travelling companions. They are beautiful, intelligent, and have many skills which could be of use to the party. The DM should generate a very generous treasure (remembering to return a PC's magic item if such was given up to the djinni in the Old Man encounter.) In addition to the magical and mundane treasures within it, the tower itself is made of gold. Once the curse is broken, it may easily be melted down. Of course, so much gold requires a great deal of care to transport, and the PCs might well remember the djinni's warning against greed.

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Insect Labs Incorporated

An Update For The AMAZING ENGINE® KROMOSOME Universe

by Wolfgang Baur

The KROMOSOME setting describes a dark future of nightmarish genetic engineering—a biopunk world. A major new threat has recently engulfed portions of the Caribbean and threatens both the North America Free Trade Zone and the rich New Brazilian coast to the south: the corporation called Insect Labs Incorporated (ILI) has decided to cleanse the region prior to an automated corporate takeover.

This is the lowdown on the behind-the-scenes schemes of ILI, a corporate player that builds interfaces, net hardware, specialized genemods, and artificial intelligences (AIs). The article sketches out the ILI's major players (and opponent), Net and biohazard weapons, and their scheme for a biological warfare blitzkrieg.

The Plan

The Insect Labs hope to establish a utopia of computer-enhanced and biogentically perfect employee-citizens in the Caribbean. They've been led to believe that ILI will rule the new corporate domain, but even the major players at ILI aren't sure which of them will ultimately be in control. In fact, the Insect Labs AIs are hoping to seize power and rule a perfect hive-state. To this end, the AI has begun testing various theories of hive intelligence under controlled experimental conditions. For it, the takeover of the Caribbean basin is just an opportunity to expand the scope of its research.

The Biohazards

The ILI plan calls for "eliminating pre-existing fauna" by introducing three simultaneous disease vectors into the Caribbean basin: the rhizome plague, the snakeskin bacteria, and the necrovirus. The fact that these overlapping plagues may spread outside the containment zone does not seem to upset ILI's security staff.

The Louisiana rhizome plague itself is a fungal infection that attacks the lungs, slowly destroying the alveoli until the lungs can't absorb oxygen, much like emphysema. Symptoms include wheezing, shortness of breath, and eventually suffocation as lungs collapse. The fungus cannot be treated with normal antibiotics, antiviral compounds, or gene therapy, so the epidemic's expansion is slow but steady. Most fungi are as slow-acting as leprosy, but ILI's special Louisiana rhizovector is much more dangerous, because it can remain dormant in a spore form for months or even years. The rhizome plague has spread throughout New Brazil and has even broken out along the southern Chinese coast, where strict quarantine measures (and rumored cleansing executions and cremations of infected victims) have kept it under control.

Plagues	Daily Stamina	Immunity LossCheck
LA rhizome	2	Easy
Necrovirus	1	Very Difficult
Snakeskin	4	Difficult

Ironically, the Insect Labs AI in Hispania was asked for an analysis of the rhizome plague. Obedient to its core directives, the AI promptly blamed the plague on mutation due to nuclear waste dumping off the Gulf Coast, near Houston. At the moment, the media are buying it. The PCs, however, may uncover the truth.

The necrovirus is a very carefully engineered construct from the ILI labs, designed to puncture the cells of specific organs, destroying those organs one cell at a time. The necrovirus responds to treatment with antiviral drugs, but so far the virus itself has not been isolated so that treatments can be optimized. Victims of the disease die when their hearts, kidneys, or livers are liquified. Practitioners of voodoo in Hispaniola and elsewhere are convinced that the missing organs are the work of spirits, and they call the disease the work of a flesh-eater, so the true nature of the disease has not yet been determined.

A new breed of staph bacteria has spread along Cuba, the Bahamas, and Florida, causing a disease called snakeskin that attacks the basal skin cells, the cells that replace the skin as it flakes off. The major symptoms include massive skin shedding, eventually leading to exposed, raw flesh all over the victim's body. It kills the victim through secondary infections—and makes te victim more vulnerable to the other two ILI plagues. The bacteria are immune to all known antibiotics, and the disease quickly overwhelms the weakened immune systems of the poor.

The plagues have only begun to work, and so far they are considered perfectly natural products of the high rate of mutation in the polluted Caribbean environment. Aid convoys to major population centers have been organized by Polygene, the EC, and the NAFTZ, though all of them have been delivered with remote-controlled vehicles.

Though the plagues themselves are horrible, ILI doesn't expect them to kill off the entire population. The plagues have been engineered to have obvious, horrific symptoms, to panic others into leaving the area of the epidemics. By creating a swarm of refugees, ILI achieves two goals: it rids itself of an unwanted population while simultaneously disrupting its neighbors so they don't pry into ILI's affairs too closely.

The CEO

Miranda Jones is a Haitian with a silicon chip on her shoulder. Her visible genetic modifications include a brain jack and geodesic skeleton. Her eyes also may be enhanced, but she wears round shades with sunblockers around the lenses along with her business suit, so her eyes are as inscrutable as a fly's.

Miranda always has been fascinated with group activities, hives, and dense communities. She scrabbled her way out of the Kingston slums and attended the Cornell University entomology program, studying insects and computer science, then later business management and law. Miranda's obsessions are reflected in the logos she chose for her microcorporation: The ILI logos are stylized insects. Each division has its own logo: a mantis for defense contracts, grasshopper for agriculture, and ant for AI and Netware.

Miranda "Dragonfly" Jones
F: 69 **L:** 59 **Ps:** 34 **C:** 54
R: 58 **I:** 42 **W:** 61 **Pos:** 54
Stam: 27 **Body:** 17 Mind: 34 Immun: 61

Skills: Biotechnology (59), Bluff (54), Spin Control (54), Exotic Firearms: Gene Gun (68), General Science (59), Interface Kite (59), Luck (34), Kickboxing (68), Netrunning (64), Portugese (59), Spanish (59)

Genemods: Adrenal, brain-jack, catseyes, heightened immunity, geodesic skeleton, photoskin

Because she grew up in the shantytowns of the Caribbean, Miranda has always been driven to improve and optimize human living arrangements. Oddly enough, she seems to admire population density and social engineering to maintain city clusters. She is a great admirer of the Chinese hormone lock technology, which freezes human development before puberty and creates a class of drone workers.

A/N surf, zero parity, full echo, full filter
Sector: NAFTZ, Node: Houston, User: Lone Star
13:16:34, 8.6.44

>>Senorita Jones ain't just talking the talk. She's from the street, so her suits can't get much past her, and not much bothers her. That's what bothers me; the bitch is cold.<<

Electronic Architectures Chief

The bald, portly chief designer, program architect, and AI expert at ILI is a North American named Howard Arthur Baines. He has a backdoor program that he expects to use if the AIs in his charge try any tricks. The AIs, of course, don't intend to give him the chance.

Arty keeps a low profile as a sort of absent-minded academic, but in fact he is a canny investor who owns 24% of ILI and has plans to rule a utopia of his own design. Frankly, the AIs have been doing most of the design work for Arty's plagues, and Arty believes that he has vaccinated his employees against the diseases. In fact, the vaccines are bogus, and the AIs are generating hormone-locked drones in a special research facility hidden behind a maze of paperwork and electronic files.

Howard Arthur "Arty" Baines
F: 23 **L:** 60 **Ps:** 35 **C:** 22
R: 28 **I:** 35 **W:** 38 **Pos:** 49
Stam: 6 **Body:** 17 Mind: 35 Immun: 17

Skills: Artificial Intelligence (60), Eavesdropping (60), Electronics (60), English (60), Netrunning (65), Programming (60), Pistol (28), Spanish (60), Stock Manipulation (49)

Genemods: Brain-jack, photoskin

Arty gets along with Miranda because she wows those outside the company, and he wows those inside. Gearheads worship him, and he spends many of his waking hours on the net at the Invisibile Sun database, sifting information, exchanging AI access time for new software, and keeping tabs on the electronic world.

The AI

IL4 was built on the algorithms of a termite colony and has retained their fondness for slowly accreting a home. IL4 is protective of Arty—who has hardwired himself into its core programming as the queen of the hive—but it feels the need to replace the aging queen. Miranda has told IL4 that Arty is redundant, and the AI tends to agree.

IL4
F: N/A **L:** 68 **Ps:** 82 **C:** 34
R: 87 **I:** 51 **W:** 90 **Pos:** 12
Stam: 88 **Body:** N/A Mind: 82

Skills: Biochemistry (68), Biotechnology (68), Bluff (34), Data Forgery (51), Entomology (68), General Sciences (68), Image Manipulation (82), Netrunning (68), Security Systems (68), Social Engineering (34), Social Sciences (78)

IL4 has picked up some dangerous notions from Miranda lately, gained through some selective snooping in her social insect modeling programs. IL4 knows that it functions as a hive intelligence, and it is egotistical enough to believe that humans should do the same.

It has subtly influenced Miranda's beliefs in this regard, slowing winning her over to a radical position. It has forged medical data to make it appear as if no more than 5% of ILI's "vaccinated" workers will be affected; in fact, the real figure is closer to 50%.

Tech Fetishes

PCs investigating the biological blitzkrieg are likely to make the acquaintance of heavily-armed ILI employees.

Insect Lab personel use shredder bullets, a form of ammunition known for the huge ragged wounds it makes, with a lethality of +1. Their preferred firearms are heavy pistols equipped with silencers and electrothermal rifles. Leaders carry gene guns or submachine guns, and elite strike teams carry dart guns loaded with botulin.

Where the Data Is Buried

Clues to the forces behind the plagues are scattered throughout the Western Hemisphere and the Net.

The Insect Labs have hidden the core data describing their plagues, the manufacture of Net zombies, and the hardware required to engineer it all in data havens in Panama, Liberia, the Isle of Man, the Cayman Islands, and Grenada.

No single file is enough to prosecute them; each is only a part of the whole, and each is disguised as innocuous and legitimate research into anti-fungal drugs, human-machine interfaces, and related fields. The most important files are encrypted with a one-directional code, so the data cannot be retrieved without the proper key or massive processing power.

When It All Goes Down

Characters who find out about the source of the new biohazard may need hard evidence to convince others of the truth (requiring a raid on an ILI net node or a physical raid on a lab), and they may decide to take matters into their own hands.

If they can discover the treachery of one of the three major players and expose it to the other two, the resulting infighting should stop the whole plan in its tracks. Getting to the executives, not to mention convincing them, could be quite a challenge.

Alternatively, they may discover the same cure as Inga Flensirsdottir, the EC parliamentarian, and may run into the same dangers. After all, AIs never sleep.

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Conspired To Succeed

New Professions for Dark Conspiracy Players

by Alex Iwanow

Dark Conspiracy game enthusiasts can choose from a diverse assemblage of more than 60 careers for their PCs. From astronaut to politician, cyborg escapee to psychic test subject, this broad array of options encourages the creation of a colorful, well-rounded, three-dimensional character. Now, Dark Conspiracy GMs can insert these new career templates into their campaigns, giving their players an even wider palette with which to paint.

Genre Writer

Yours is a life of constant corrosion and blow-by-blow personality dismemberment. Unwilling to bow down to the terminal edicts of your decomposing profession (fruitless literary rehash, transparent and predictable prose), you suffer and starve, bleeding your vision onto the keyboard. Someday, perhaps posthumously, your convictions will ennoble you.

These days the television is preferred to the paperback. A few hardcore publishing houses subsist by printing technical documents (as physical backup to their silicon counterparts) and mailers for the megacorps. The screenwriting market chokes on its formulaic gorge, while PBS stations have sold out the meaning of their collective acronym. With illiteracy at its apocalyptic peak, traditional, text-oriented literature is condemned to trifling underground circuits (nickel-budgeted pamphlets, 5 1/4" floppy disks) from which you barely eke out a living.

There were times that you were sure your efforts were futile, hazy bouts of intoxication in which ghosts dressed in suits and ties would smoke through the walls to stamp OBSOLESCENCE across your forehead. But living in the underground for so long conveyed its rewards, as you've been granted glimpses of entities, real entities, whose existence would otherwise seem plausible only in your fiction. Through ingenious journalistic conspiracies, you developed a fledgling understanding of these unknowable sources of evil. One word puzzle in a television listing for a channel that didn't exist cited these beings as Dark Minions.

Basing your literary output on something the megacorps seem intent on shrouding in mystery could get you erased. But oh! Immortality beckons with every line, each paragraph, each syllable! You must find like-minded individuals, other stout-willed believers who are dedicated to ferreting out these creatures. What better way to conduct research than first-hand?

Entry: Intelligence 5+

First Term Skills: Computer Operation 1, Observation 2, Psychology 1, Willpower 2

Subsequent Term Skills: A total of 5 levels from any one or a combination of the following: Act/Bluff, Bargain, Business, Forgery, Language, Luck, Observation, Persuasion, Psychology, and Streetwise.

Contacts: Two per term: editor, journalist, publisher, fellow writer, or any NPC of any occupation who is an admirer of your work. On a d10 roll of 9+, the contact is foreign.

Special: Genre writers may have two secondary activities per term and receive 1/4 of their normal income each term.

Institutionalized

You witnessed a transaction of supernatural significance (consult the GM for specifics), then foolishly reported it. Subsequently branded a "fraudulent attention-seeker" and "societal agitator of criminal proportions," you were requested to undergo memory-reducing neurosurgery in return for your old life.

Rebuke met with reprimand, and retaliation resulted in your banishment to a mental health facility. Your "evaluation" has been going on for incalculable months . . . or years.

You are certain that the horrible creatures you saw were not the product of "ruptured cerebral membranes" or "genetic fetal trauma." Hallucinations don't draw blood, and figments can't tear flesh. It can only make you wonder why the megacorps consider you such a dangerous glitch in their veil of deception, having made you out as some drooling lunatic in front of everyone that used to know you.

You've been watching the doors, observing the guards, acknowledging the patterns. Escape is inevitable.

Entry: Forced due to insanity charges.

Skills: Learned from fellow inmates. A total of 6 levels from any one or a combination of the following: Act/Bluff, Bargain, Forgery, Human Empathy (if Emp 1+), Instruction, Language, Lockpick, Melee Combat (unarmed), Observation, Persuasion, Pickpocket, Psychology, Stealth, Willpower.

Contacts: Two per four-year term: sympathetic psychiatrist or nurse, just about any type of NPC who has been similarly condemned. Consult your GM for specifics or advice.

Special: After one term, the character has a chance to escape each subsequent year. On a d10 roll: 1-2 failure; 3-7 no opportunity; 8+ success.

Progressive Zoologist

You make your living through the capture, maintenance, study, and domestication of the ever-evolving catalogue of beasties and other mutated terran creatures of the Out-Law zones of North America. With escapism on just about everyone's mind, the survival rate of zoos, circuses, and animal exhibition has not receded drastically. Of course, what was a public privilege years ago can be afforded only by the rich today. Private and corporate zoos have become fashionable investments among the gnomenklatura and their ilk.

To be honest, you despise (or perhaps envy) your affluent employers and do not enjoy being on the submissive end of the leash. But without their funds to propagate armed escort into the Out-Law zones to cage potential zoo beasties,

you'd surely fall prey to the creatures with which you are so fascinated.

Employment by the gnomes translates into dealing with the tentacles of the megacorps, which you've found to be responsible for turning loose some of your more exotic captures. Sedan-sized vultures, three-headed camels, and the occasional chimera seem to be acceptable. But the technology and force with which you've been equipped has allowed the capture of specimens a dozen times stranger, many of them humanoid and intelligent! Ironically, your superiors insist that you do not speak of, think about, or publish anything on these latter discoveries.

You are confused. You are suspicious. You are frustrated. You must find a way to escape the shadow of your employers, piece together a similarly curious team, then resume your otherworldly research independently.

Entry: Intelligence 5+, Empathy 2+

First Term Skills: Animal Empathy 2, Biology 3, Small Arms (Rifle) 1

Subsequent Term Skills: 6 levels from any one or a combination of: Animal Empathy, Biology, Horsemanship, Instruction, Melee Combat, Observation, Psychology, Swimming, Tracking, Vehicle Use (Wheeled Vehicle).

Contacts: One per term: biologist, entertainer (animal-related), environmentalist, hunter, Out-Law zone biker or nomad, veterinarian, zoo keeper. On d10 roll of 10, contact is foreign.

Special: PC receives trained animal/beast as pet. Specifics are left to the GM.

Sewer Scum

Certain eroding events took place within the past few years of your life, leading you to reject civilization altogether. You retreated to the effectively antisocial tunnels underneath the metroplex: the quarantined sewer net. Through close-call tribulations and an abundance of sheer luck, you absorbed the basic tricks of subterranean survival, which mostly consisted of stealing from the surface, then fleeing back home, where no right-minded larceny victim dared to follow.

Despite a relatively successful adaptation, you eventually concluded that your new lifestyle was too exhausting and dangerous to be effectively maintained.

Then one day it dawned upon you how someone of such unique environmental competence could make quite a bit of cash. Catering mostly to the bounty hunter crowd, you were happily hired by those needing to travel surreptitiously. Some of your more passionate clientele revealed much about the Dark Minions, building on your suspicion that their existence was not a fiction.

Elated by their determination and rapture, you later dedicated yourself to the destruction of these faceless, plotting menaces.

After scraping away all the scum that made your life so miserable, you decide that there are members of humanity worth saving.

Entry: Constitution 5+
First Term Skills: Observation 2, Swimming 2, Willpower 1

Subsequent Term Skills: A total of 6 levels from any one or a combination of the following in Group A. Or, pick two from Group B.

Group A: Navigation, Melee Combat, Observation, Stealth, Swimming, Tracking, Vessel Use (Boat), Willpower.

Group B: AGL +1, STR +1, CON +1

Contacts: One per term: bounty hunter, mercenary, merchant marine, or any other frequent, satisfied customer.

Special: Navigation and Tracking skills can be applied only in sewer environments. If these skills are/were taken in a previous or future career, differentiate them on your character sheet as "sewer" or "traditional" skills.

There exists a dangerously high level of supernatural presence in the urban underground. Hence, there is a chance each term that a sewer scum character will be forced to abandon his career forever, having experienced some unfathomably horrible manifestation of evil. The GM will provide details on this occurrence, which takes place on a d10 roll of 6+ (roll each term).

All skills or attribute levels gained for that term are lost. But no substantial period of time passes for the character, either.

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A Squid's-Eye-View

Of The MYSTARA™ Game World

by Bruce Heard

Months have passed since I was summoned to the Pool. There, the thoughts of the Elder unveiled to my mind suspicions about a new world. As faint as they were, distant echoes of psionic sentience had caught the Elder's attention. Someone there was using a magic that rippled this far. The Elder wished to unveil this magic—and I was to investigate.

Since then, I have gathered many items from that world, flotsam of the planes. Here, at the edge of my table sits a stack of scrolls, former possessions of a human wizard fallen before me. There, on a pedestal, a ball of crystal glows eerily. Tomes and tablets, tapestries of animated magic, and a few slaves captured by chance, all revealed to me their origins. They came from the place I now seek—a place called Mystara. Before I go there myself, let's first see what else they will tell. Azor, my servant, fetch the first item at once!

Excerpt from Painted Silks, from Tosuglaï, Astronomer of Ethengar

"Great Khan, my Honored Master, at last I have pierced the secret of our world. As I suspected, our world isn't flat. It is indeed a sphere surrounded by a magical force to keep celestial objects out.

"It is called the Skyshield. Intriguing is the presence of a world within our own. I had first thought the depths of Mystara to be filled with rock and fire, but it isn't so, my master. The stars have told me otherwise.

"The truth is that our world is hollow, with seas and continents covering its inner surface. At the very center of the hollow world burns a motionless sun.

"Its reddish glow radiates softly through two enormous openings at the south and north poles of our world. I could see its glint on the stars.

"I heard the King of Karameikos sent an expedition to the northern pole to find its opening. But no one ever heard from them again."

"Beside the inhuman weather at the poles, the magic of the Immortals prevents mere mortals from getting through. So far, my own magic has failed to unveil any more about this hollow world.

"The stars have never lied to me, nor have they lied to my father, not my father before him. Indeed, our world is the center of the universe, and you, Great Khan of the Khans, are the greatest of its rulers."

Good! These people aren't yet familiar with the vast universe around their little world, much less with us. Their skyshield may be a problem for our star-traveling ships, however. Perhaps there are occasional windows to enter their skies, but I have little time to try this. I shall use magic to enter their world, quickly and unseen. Yes, Azor, you shall come with me. What is this you hold in your greedy little paws?

Scribbles on a Diary, from a Student in Karameikos

"Today we were taught about the Day of Dread and what really happens on the last day of the year. My father had always told me that it was a day of reckoning, a day to think of one's accomplishments and goals for the new year. It is much more. Little did my father know—of course, he knows neither magic nor wizards.

"The Day of Dread is a time when magic recedes from the whole world of Mystara. It is believed that the foolishness of Glantrian wizards who practice forbidden magic caused the Day of Dread. During that time, the spells of wizards and priests fail. Mighty weapons of the heroes and magical wards protecting the abodes of the rich and powerful all lose their power.

"In places like Imperial Thyatis and Glantri where horrid monsters are often kept in magical bonds, people barricade themselves, fearing that these creatures break free. On that day they often do. Thirty giant spiders once escaped from the Arenas before the gladiators could defeat them."

"It took weeks to hunt them down. Fortunately, some of the more powerful magical monsters flee to other planes for the day, hoping to escape Mystara's Day of Dread.

"Not all magic is actually gone. Some creatures manage to retain abilities without which they would die for sure. Many say that this is the work of the Immortals whose magic is immune to the Day of Dread. But I live in a simple kingdom. We have no such creatures and the Immortals seem very far away. For me at least, I can see one advantage. I've been trying to reach Constantia after class, away from prying eyes. But she lives at the tower of her father—a ruthless wizard with no heart. All entrances are magically sealed. But tonight, when magic fails, Constantia will open her window and I will be there, waiting for her signal."

Well, it seems I'll simply have to avoid that fateful day. I would be stranded there, unable to have it my way with these Mystarans. I care not to test the effects of magical weakening. How unusual indeed.

Letter from a Merchant to his Son

"I like this place. It looks like all the peoples of Mystara once moved to this small corner of the world, centuries ago, and settled here all at the same time. Why? Perhaps because it is the edge of a continent and it sits at the crossroads of a few others. Perhaps because the Immortals guided them here. The natives call it the Known World. There, more than anywhere else on Mystara, the nations know each other very well and commonly deal with each other. A good deal of trade exists, which is perfect for someone like me. The differences among the people are striking. In Karameikos, we have a simple kingdom shared by two main peoples. One is the Traladaran, an ancient tribe native of this region. They fought against tribes of savage humanoids and even vampires to preserve their culture and freedom.

"Neighboring Thyatis, a powerful empire, once conquered them and the native Traladarans had to share their land with their new masters. With time, the new imperial province called itself Karameikos, from the name of the ruling family. The empire was greatly weakened during a brutal war against a rival empire to the east. Since then, Karameikos declared its independence and its ruler became a king.

"Thyatis, however, rife with greed and corruption, is famous for its arenas, its palaces, and monuments once erected to celebrate the glory of its imperial legions. As early as a few decades ago, all the nations of the Known World still lived in fear of the imperial military might. But ever since its great war against the east, Thyatis has been plagued with civil unrest, endemic slave revolts, and a rotting disease slowly spreading among its population. It is rumored that imperial cohorts brought the strange epidemic back with them, after plundering ancient tombs during their colonial campaigns. Despite all this, Thyatis still remains a center of great wealth and influence in the Known World, a place where good business can be found."

So it seems this "Known World" is the place to go first. But I don't believe either of these two realms to be harboring the magic the Elder detected. These seem more like nations of warriors. I know the type—they have little understanding for my kind. They would, at best, drive a hard bargain. I shall not enter Mystara's Known World there. Let's go on.

"North of Karameikos and its imperial neighbor, Thyatis, lies a mosaic of more than twelve small nations, each almost a stone's throw away from the other. Among them, the tribes of Ylaruam rule the deserts on the other side of the Thyatian mountains.

"These are proud and fierce warriors with a undying faith for their ancient prophet. It still is a mystery why the burning deserts of Ylaruam exist so close to other nations.

"A sage suggested that a greater realm once existed there, whose rulers had mastered the secrets of necromancy. But they went too far and angered the Immortals. They obliterated their evil civilization and cursed their land to burn eternally."

Not a chance. I hate these exalted mindsets. Very inflexible. Too temperamental. No sense of humor. It would be wise to look elsewhere.

"Further yet to the north, exist four other nations, Soderfjord, Vestland, Ostland, and Heldann. These are tall, blond people for the most part, who are notorious for their strength and hardiness. These are people who build longships, the dreaded drakkars, to carry the fury of their raids to distant lands. Of the four realms, Heldann is the one that changed the most today. Several decades ago an order of knights began moving in and slowly took control over the land. In the course of their crusade to spread their faith among the savage Heldanners, they eventually founded a major port on the coast and built a great temple there. It is the siege of their order, now called the Heldannic Knights. They seek war to raise their black and white banners over more people.

"West from Heldann rule the Ethengarians and the dwarves of Rockhome. Ethengar is a vast grassland, the realm of skillful horse-riding archers. They are a proud people who desire nothing more but the freedom of roaming their vast plain and to honor their Great Khan. Next to them rule the dwarves, controlling a large mountain range. There, on the side of imposing mountains, they built fortified cities extending deep into the rock. The cities are as numerous as the clans that built them and rival among each other."

Barbarians, all of them. I have no use for these, other than cattle. They can cling to their swords and castles. They are no challenge to the power of our minds. No, these cannot be the ones whose magic echoes through the planes. Then, what else is there?

"The dwarves sometimes clash with the elves, their western neighbors. Although, the elves have had to face great trouble. Many centuries ago, a cataclysm shook the World of Mystara. and the elves were forced out of their ancestral lands. "

The tribes split apart and scattered throughout the world. One came to the forest Alfheim where they learned the magic to grow giant oaks. There, they begun living a reclusive, self-centered life.

Another tribe, in an attempt to escape the cataclysm, went underground. Centuries of darkness turned their skin pale and their hair silver or white. They are the Shadow Elves. Rumors say that they went as far deep as the mid-point between the surface and a mysterious realm at the center of our world. There, they found a huge cavern where one can walk on the ground as well as on the vault. They built a city up on the vault which they named the City of Stars. Seen from the ground, its lights shine like stars.

"The shadow elves avoided the surface for a very long time, thinking it had been devastated by the cataclysm, that is until they ran across adventurers. They followed them and discovered the truth.

"Their journey to the surface led the Shadow Elves up to Alfheim. At first, the wood elves welcomed their brethren from the deep, but soon they learned how many they were and refused to shelter any more of them. Angered by their cousins' selfishness, the Shadow Elves cursed the forest of Alfheim, twisting its trees and giving it a dark, evil look. "The wood elves fled, some to Karameikos, others to distant elven realm. Since then, Shadow Elves have taken over the forest, but lacking the magic of the wood elves, the trees are slowly dying, perhaps someday forcing the Shadow Elves back to their dark kingdom."

Aha. This shows promise. Let's keep note of the shadow elves, they could be of some use to my quest.

They could have the knowledge to wield the magic I seek.

Darkness does wonders for one's mind. The underdark has none of this hateful sunlight that pains the eyes and disturbs inner thoughts.

It would be easy for me to enter this realm, unseen and free to act. I suspect its deepest caverns connect Mystara's surface and to the hollow world. How convenient.

"At last, this brings me to the Republic of Darokin. This, my son, is definitely the place to run a business. Imagine this: a land founded and ruled by the richest merchant families. It is one of the largest countries, crisscrossed with trails and roads built especially for the passage of caravans.

"This nation has borders with nine nations and has some trade links with all the realms of the Known World. Its caravans travel from one end of the region to the other, carrying untold wonders and treasures from distant kingdoms. So dear is this trade to the rulers of Darokin that they've sent emissaries to almost every major city and port of the region, for the sole purpose of defusing or fanning conflicts that would benefit the merchant guilds. Of utmost importance is the protection of its cities and caravan trails for which the guilds spend fortunes to maintain and train the very best of mercenary troops and condottieri.

"I like Darokin very much, my son, and I'm sure you will love it too. It is a safe and prosperous nation. I've set up shop at the capital city, from which I sent you this letter. Business is good and I think I'll be able to buy the space next door. I urge you to sell our business and come with the family. You will find my shop across the Merchant Guildhouse. Beware, however, I'm told pirates often raid ships sailing toward Darokin and seasonal forays of starving humanoids from the northern Broken Lands are a regular occurrence. Farewell, my son."

Greed has made the power of man. Greed is also his undoing. If I'm right, there is nothing one couldn't buy from these Darokinians—it is only a question of price. This could be useful. Now, what's this? Human skullcaps, crudely engraved. Ah, yes. Humanoid literature. Let us decipher its meaning.

Various Engraved Bones, from Humanoid Scribes

I. *"We, King Kol XIV, Ruler of Upper and Lower Kol, declare the Broken Lands free of the tyranny of Thar the Despot. We, Lord of the Mighty Kobolds, Master of all Broken Lands, in honor of the Immortals who created the Great Crater, do hereby establish our new throne in Kolossopolis, at the center of said Great Crater. Further, we also do declare Thar the Despot and his followers outlaws to be brought before us dead or alive for immediate ~~torture, dismemberment~~, fair trial."*

II. *"We, King Thar, True Ruler of the Broken Lands, have moved our winter camp to the mountains between Ylaruam and Soderfjord. We declare open the season for plunder among the human villages. Food and slaves are to be distributed among everyone at the winter camp. Gold is to be used to ~~lure, enslave,~~ fairly recruit new orc tribes. When our arms are strong again, our steel plentiful, and our war machines rebuilt, we shall march again against Kol the Usurper and his vile followers. The warrior breaking his scrawny kobold neck will be awarded rulership of his ancestral domain. Thus said Thar the Great."*

III. *"We, Kol XIV, do accept the terms of the Glantrian treaty, whereby in exchange for an end to seasonal raids from the Broken Lands into Glantrian territories, we, Kol XIV, are hereby and forever granted Glantrian Principalities of Blackhill and Caurenze, with said principalities to be renamed South Kolland, and wherefore the hereditary title, rights, honors, and full authority as a legitimate Prince of Glantri, as well as a permanent seat at the Glantrian Council. We, Kol XIV, shall also retain sole and independent control over the Broken Lands and the Great Crater."*

Pest! Rodents, I say. Humanoids are a nuisance that can only be destroyed or enslaved for the good of a greater race. Quiet, Azor! Sit still unless you desire to feel the pain of my tentacles boring through your shrivelled little brain.

Either these Glantrians are manipulating this pretentious kobold, or they are fools. Who are these people? I haven't found much on them yet. Azor, bring me this ebony disk, over there.

Animated Magical Runes, from a Glantrian Wizard's Diary

"So, they hate the werewolves? So much the better. It will keep the commoners away.

"I have no sympathy for those cursed with lycanthropy, but one must admit they do know their business.

"No one who isn't part of their circle ever intrudes upon them. Aah, I wished my invisible servants and my magical wards could think as keenly and as quickly as this howling bunch. Why, no later than this morning, an impudent merchant came up to my tower to peddle his goods—enchanted clothing that never soils nor rips. Peh, mere trinkets, a product of the students' ill-conceived experiments at the School of Magic.

"The wretch wouldn't stop ringing my bell. I had to leave my work causing my brew to sour and turn to slime. I bestowed upon the impudent a magical quest forever to peddle his goods to Henri d'Ambreville, a rival colleague of mine.

"So, the Council of Glantri awarded the werewolves their own principality? Well, that's just fine with me!

"It can't be any worse than the Principality of Boldavia—the place is rampant with vampires and other undead. I hear that travelers and merchants are always welcome there. At least one does not have to lose sleep every full moon. A little garlic here, a few more wards there, and a wizard can live a quiet life of research and enlightenment.

"And that kobold buffoon from South Kolland. What a scandal! If the Council really thinks this feeble attempt will stop the orc raids into Glantri, they are utter fools. I already have a dungeon full of those bumbling orcs—they drive all the *good* monsters away! How can a wizard now find decent spell components?

"I'm sure someone at the Council was paid off to vote for that kobold—it's got to be that mad d'Ambreville again. Where will he stop? Accepting a pretentious kobold as the peer of Wizard Princes! Ha! What a sorry joke indeed. . . .

"Nevertheless, those who will never be stopped are these blasted tax collectors. I know they are watching me, from over there, hidden in their dark tower. I despise their obtrusive bureaucracy and their right to intrude, to spy, to coerce, and to extort, all in the name of the Council of course! Everything requires a license, from running a tavern to casting spells in public, owning monsters, and building dungeons. Everything is regulated and controlled."

"This is a nation of wizards, created by wizards for wizards, and yet this nation feels compelled to protect itself from the magic of its very own citizens. They bleed us dry, these princes. Aha! But I know something they don't. I know there is an arcane power within the principalities. It ebbs and flows from under the capital city. I discovered it last year. It made me sick at first, delirious even. It gave me dreams of awesome creatures made of glowing fire. In my dreams, they told me how to build a special scrying device. From it, I can now hear the voices of others who, like me, have discovered the force that radiates from the very City of Glantri. I know not who they are, just as they are unaware of each other's identities. But like me, they study the force.

"It leads to immortality they say. It gives a wizard greater magical prowess. But I know someone or something ghastly hides behind it, quietly watching, manipulating, plotting."

Now, this is more like it. Here is a place that shows true potential. Let's see about this Glantrian land. Yes, my *crystal ball* will do perfectly. I can now see the clouds swirling. There. Here it is. Strange, the city has no streets, only watery canals with a chaotic jumble of gondolas, row boats, and rafts. I can see a range of mountains in the east, high and jagged. A river flows from the north into the city but the city seems to have more water in its canals than the river can provide. Oh, I see now. There are gates opening into the elemental plane of water strewn about the bottom of the canals. Inventive, these Glantrians.

Yes, it is here. I can feel it now, the echo that the Elder sensed. It comes from this place. Someone there is being indiscreet. I think it is time for me to see who lies there. Azor, light these candles. They will open the gate to this place—Mystara. Good. Now come with me. Let us visit this School of Magic. It seems like as good a place as any to start. A sudden craving for Glantrian delectable grey matter titillates my intellect. I can already taste the crackle of my prey's nervous synapses collapsing under the strain of my superior brain waves. Azor, my servant, let us go at once!

What? It's a trap! How dare they? Back up! Back up!

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"Now, now, children! Be very careful with this sort of magic! It is not because you've just begun your second year at the School of Magic that you should go about inconsiderately using summoning spells. This one is very powerful but tricky. It hasn't been thoroughly tested yet—there was no telling what it would attract.

"Last month, weeks after the original spell had been cast, something yet unseen in Mystara appeared into the magical circle, a creature of great mental prowess. Well, not as great as ours of course. I have placed it in this large crystal jar to preserve its flesh, along with that of its kobold servant.

"Thus, today we shall study creatures from the outer planes. Observe the purple flesh and the bulging octopus-like head. Lore reveals it to be called an illithid.

"The large white eyes give it infravision. Also notice the three reddish fingers. . . .Tommy! Stop that! Don't poke at the creature with your wand and put the lid back on the crystal!

"What was I saying? Ah, yes. Look at the tentacles where the mouth should be. The creature uses them to bore into its victims' heads and eat their brains. But this is nothing compared to what it can do with its own psionic thoughts. In an instant, the creature can destroy your brain. And who will tell me what illithid ichor could used for, hmmm?

"Very good, Tommy. Yes, illithid could be used in the brewing of *potions of ESP*. Now open your monstrous manuals to page 251, at the picture showing the illithid. I want you to study its internal organs and read the chapter on ecology. Tomorrow we shall dissect the head, so be on time."

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Kre'ketrac

A Psionic Item for the DARK SUN® Campaign Setting

by Bill Slavicsek

The DARK SUN® campaign world is changing. Social and political upheaval in the wake of Rajaat's return and subsequent defeat is only the beginning (see the *Prism Pentad* novel series for full details).

There are also environmental changes to face. For example, rain has been falling in the Sea of Silt for nearly a month now (another consequence of the battle with Rajaat), and a terrible earthquake tore through the Tyr region (see the upcoming *Thri-Kreen of Athas* accessory for details). These events herald even greater changes to be revealed over the next year in DARK SUN products.

The Tyr region soon will be rocked by revelations from the past, secrets of the present, and predictions of the future. In this piece, we'll examine an artifact from the ancient times of Athas, one that can be introduced into DARK SUN campaigns.

illustration by Baxa

Background

The recent earthquake that rumbled through the Tyr region altered a substantial portion of the terrain. Specifically, the face of the Ringing Mountains has been reshaped by the forces of nature. Some peaks were thrust higher into the sky, some were swallowed into the rumbling depths, and others were cracked and shattered by the shifting ground. In one such area of broken land, an agent of House M'ke made a startling discovery. Lakul Del and his caravan were traveling from the House M'ke outpost of Jalaka (at the edge of the Forest Ridge) toward Tyr. It was the first leg of the caravan's route through the region, and Lakul was eager to see what the markets had to offer.

The normal route was no longer accessible due to the alterations to the land made by the earthquake, so Lakul had to find a new path through the mountains. Being an adventurous sort, he personally led a small scouting party ahead to forge a safe path. As they worked their way over jagged ground and around great, steaming cracks, something caught Lakul's attention. In the midst of splintered trees and upturned rocks, a bright blue substance shimmered. Lakul gathered his scouts and pushed through the tangle to see what had been unearthed.

Lakul Del found a place from an earlier age. It was a structure of some sort, perhaps a home or temple, but it was unlike anything that the merchant had seen before. The first thing that struck him was the color. It was a vibrant blue that almost appeared to glow. The second thing was its beauty, for it was a structure of flowing curves and sweeping spires apparently constructed from a single piece of stone. No, constructed wasn't quite the right word, Lakul thought. It had no sharp corners, no straight lines, no obvious signs of being carved or worked in any way. In fact, if it weren't made of stone (albeit a strange stone), Lakul would have sworn it had grown into its form.

After briefly exploring the partially unearthed exterior, Lakul proposed entering the structure to see what mysteries it contained. His companions were wary, for places of the ancients often have unforgiving guardians.

Opinions were exchanged, and then Lakul offered to triple the pay rate for this trading expedition (for he fully expected to find fabulous treasures within the ancient site). The scouts agreed, and the party carefully entered through a doorway that seemed designed to accommodate creatures the size of halflings.

Inside, everything had an organic feel to it. Chambers were amorphous, with curving walls and furnishings of strange design growing out of every surface. The scouts advanced into the shadowy interior cautiously, but Lakul paused near the entrance to examine a small item that caught his eye. That pause saved his life. An aftershock reverberated through the area, as had numerous ones since the major quake struck. This one, however, opened a hole in the ground beneath the ancient structure. With a sudden jerk, the floor tilted and the place began to slide into oblivion. There would be no treasures taken from this site, Lakul thought with regret as he leaped through the doorway. He landed with a thump, rolled, and looked up in time to see the ground close over the place where the ancient structure stood moments before.

The scouts were gone, as were the treasures. Then Lakul Del noticed he still held the small item that had caught his eye. He clutched it tightly in his right hand. It was made from the same vibrant blue stone, and it fit snugly in the palm of his hand. It was shaped into a spiral cone and was warm to the touch. "What are you?" Lakul asked. And, as if in response, the blue spiral shifted to become a yellow zigzag. With each shift, each change of color, each new shape, Lakul sensed a psionic presence. The trader called on his own psionic talents and reached out to mindlink with the presence.

"I am Kre'ketrac the Changling," the presence communicated across the link, "how may I serve you?"

Kre'ketrac the Changling

Discipline: Psychometabolism
PSPs: 72
Sciences: Metamorphosis (9), shadow-form (9)
Devotions: Body control (11), body weaponry (12), chameleon power (14), displacement (12), expansion (13), reduction (13)
Intelligence: 16
Ego: 18
Alignment: Chaotic Good

Like other psionic items, Kre'ketrac is a unique creation with its own personality and goals (see The *Will and the Way* accessory for more information on creating psionic items). The Changling is a small chunk of amorphous, porous stone. Its vibrant color catches the eye, though it rarely remains a single shade for long. Its coloration constantly shifts from one end of the spectrum to the other, fading from blue to yellow to red with no discernible pattern. Kre'ketrac's colors aren't the only thing to shift. The item constantly changes shape, rotating through an endless series of patterns. Sometimes it keeps a single shape and color for as long as 24 hours. Other times, it changes at a frenzied pace.

Kre'ketrac was crafted by the ancients who inhabited Athas during a period called the Blue Age, a time when water was everywhere and the people were able to create anything they needed by manipulating the principles of nature. Psionics wasn't as prevalent as it would later become, but some of the ancients of the Blue Age mastered the Way. One of these gave intelligence and ego to an item named Kre'ketrac.

The Changling is capricious, flighty. It communicates quickly, constantly changing its mind or altering its opinion. Its mind is a frenzy of activity, a mercurial pool of swirling chaos, and it has difficulty remaining focused on a task. It has a very strong personality and believes itself to be better than any of these "new" races. (Kre'ketrac refers to all but the halflings as the new races.)

In addition to constantly shifting its own form, Kre'ketrac bestows these powers on its possessor as well. While it will cooperate with other good minds, it believes that change is the ultimate form of expression and goodness. So, while the item will convert its possessor to shadow-form when commanded, it will also activate chameleon power while its owner walks through a marketplace, or metamorphosize him, or expand or reduce him, just because Kre'ketrac doesn't believe that a single form should be maintained for too long. (It doesn't want its possessor to get bored, after all.)

Kre'ketrac refuses to talk about the ancients or the past. "Boring! Let's change you into something really interesting!" it replies when questioned too forcefully. While it will use its abilities to help a good-aligned possessor, it prefers the company of a chaotic good mind. Lawful minds are too rigid for the Changling's tastes, and it will do everything in its power to get such a mind to lighten up. It has no patience for evil alignments and will refuse to cooperate with a possessor who is evil. Neutrals, on the other hand, are too serene as far as the Changling is concerned. It tries to get them to take sides (always the good side) whenever a choice presents itself. Of all the "new" races, the Changling would probably have the most fun cooperating with a half-giant.

Campaign Use

Kre'ketrac starts in the possession of Lakul Del, a neutral good human trader/psionicist. The Changling is driving Lakul insane, and he'll do anything to part ways with the item. When he encounters the PCs, he'll practically give the item away. Once one of the PCs takes possession of it, the Changling becomes both a useful tool and a source of comic relief.

As a templar questions the PC, Kre'ketrac does its stuff and changes the shape or color of the PC. Or it decides to annoy its lawful owner by using its powers in the most chaotic way possible. Of course, it can't converse with its owner unless the PC uses mindlink, but it can still make its presence known in lots of amusing ways. Remember, Kre'ketrac has exceptional intelligence and a powerful ego. It takes a strong-willed PC of like alignment to get the most out of the Changling. Others are forced to rely on Kre'ketrac's flighty personality as to whether the item will assist them when called upon. Figure a 50-50 chance of cooperating with non-chaotic good characters, and a 10% chance of cooperating with any evil-aligned character.

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Crimebuster

A Hero For The Champions Game

by Monte Cook

Background

Philip Garrison has never known anything but crimefighting. His mother died when he was very young, and he was raised by his father, James, a dock worker.

James Garrison was also the superhero known as the Defender of Liberty, who fought beside a number of "Golden Age" superpatriots against the Axis powers.

Though he had no real superpowers, James was an incredible athlete and fighter, developing an impressive reputation.

After the war, he dropped the "of Liberty" part of his name, but continued to fight against crime, foreign agents, and subversion against the U.S.

As Philip grew up, James soon noticed an incredible level of intelligence in his son, especially an aptitude for electronics.

Realizing his son's potential, James worked hard at his day job to come up with enough money to put Philip through school.

In their off-time together, James trained Philip in combat and stealth techniques, thinking only to teach him self-defense.

All through childhood and into college, however, Philip wanted only to help people and to fight crime the way his father did.

He used his skills to build a suit of lightweight armor and a cybernetic cape to give to his father, who refused. ("I don't use doohickees like that, son. My two fists have served me well enough up 'til now.")

Philip took the equipment and went into the "business" for himself. Since then, he has operated as Crimebuster full time, living off of the money earned from his other patents.

Despite his sinister appearance, he maintains the optimistic mien of a 1940's crimefighter (hence his choice of name and his out-of-place dialog). He still sees the world as black and white.

Crimebuster

Val	Char	Cost	Combat Stats
25	STR	15	OCV: 10
29	DEX	57	DCV: 10
25	CON	30	ECV: 4
15	BODY	10	Phases: 2,4,6,7,9,11,12
30	INT	20	
11	EGO	2	
20	PRE	10	
20	COM	5	
10	PD	5	
9	ED	4	
7	SPD	31	
10	REC	0	
50	END	0	
41	STUN	0	

Costs

Char:	189	Base:	100
Powers:	245	Disad:	334
Totals:	434		434

Pts	Powers	END
60	Cape Multipower, all OIF Cape	
(60 points reserve)		
10m	10d6 Entangle, no range	
2u	Missile Deflection vs. all attacks, +3 to roll	
2u	10rPD 10rED	
1u	10" Gliding	
1u	2" Stretching	
1u	Extra limb	
20	10rPD 10rED OIF Armor	
3	IR Vision, OIF Helmet	
20	Comic Book Martial Arts (maneuvers listed below)	
12	+3 DC w/Martial Arts (already added in)	
5	Combat Sense 13–	
8	+4" Running (10" total)	2
10	Wealthy	

Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Damage
Martial Strike	+0	+2	10d6
Offensive Strike	–2	+1	12d6
Martial Block	+2	+2	—
Martial Dodge	—	+5	Dodge
Martial Throw	+0	+1	8d6+V/5

Quote: "You're just like all the other numb-skull crooks! Don't you know that crime does not pay?"

Personality

Philip is very much a mirror image of his father. He has adopted many of James' sensibilities, mannerisms, and even slang—which are, of course, decades out of date and somewhat archaic.

Because of his wealth, Philip has never had a "real job." Superheroics have been his whole life.

While not unlikable, he has disassociated himself from others and has had little or no private life outside of crimefighting.

Although quite excitable as a youth, Philip has seen a lot in almost twenty years of crimefighting, and he takes even the strangest and most frightening situations with a level-headed calmness.

He easily accepts ideas and concepts that another man would scoff at as being foolishness. He is still a fan of 1950's and 60's science fiction (both books and films) and has an extensive collection of pulp magazines.

He claims that he actually gets many more ideas for his inventions from these than from "hard-headed science."

Tactics/Powers

Crimebuster relies heavily on stealth and skill, realizing that mechanical devices can fail.

His cape is made of a plastisteel mesh laced with cybernetic fibers linked to his brain through the helmet.

He can use the cape as an extension of himself, controlling its size, shape, and hardness. He can wrap it around himself, fan it out as a shield, harden it into a hang glider, and use it offensively to grapple opponents.

Campaign Use

Crimebuster can be used as an NPC in virtually any campaign as an ally to the Player Characters.

He has a great deal of experience in crimefighting, and he could even be a younger player's mentor.

❑

illustration by Rob Gee

Skills

3, 3	Acrobatics 15–, Breakfall 15–
3, 7	Climbing 15–, Shadowing 13–
3, 5	Stealth 15–, Tracking 13–
3, 3	Metallurgy 15–, Physics 15–
3, 3	Electronics 15–, Computer Prog. 15–
3, 3	Deduction 15, Streetwise 13–
3, 3	Lockpicking 15–, Inventor 15–
7, 4	Mechanics 13–, AK: Seedy part of town 13–
5, 16	1 Lvl in Hand-to-hand combat, +2 Lvls in combat

100+ Disadvantages

20	Psych Lim: Puts others before self (Com, Total)
10	Psych Lim: 40's sensibilities (Very com, Moderate)
10	Enraged when innocents hurt (Enr 11–, Rec 11–, Com)
15	Secret ID (Philip Garrison)
10	Dependent NPC (Aging father), 11–
10	Hunted by Ronald Archon (As Powerful, 8–)
5	Hunted by The Stalker (Less Powerful, 8–)
349	Experience Bonus

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Arms Against the Dragonlords

Magical Weapons for the Heroes of Krynn

by Edward Gioffre

These magical weapons which follow are designed for the DRAGONLANCE™ campaign setting, but they can be used in any world.

The values of the weapons are listed in steel pieces, the standard unit of currency on Krynn. If they are used in other settings, simply substitute gold pieces for steel pieces.

Pathfinder

Background: This sword was given to Sir Andrew Pathwarden by the grateful inhabitants of towns in Estwilde, which had suffered for years under constant raids of savage ogres from the nearby mountains.

A local dwarf crafted the weapon, an elven artist engraved extensive ornamentation, and a human wizard cast powerful spells on the blade.

Eventually, Andrew passed the sword to his son, Galen Pathwarden, who in time handed it to his son, Agion Pathwarden.

The blade was lost with the death of Lord Agion Pathwarden, betrayed by one of his fellow knights (as chronicled in *The Oath and the Measure*, by Michael Williams.)

Several years later, Pathfinder was sold to a dwarven merchant by a nameless female Silvanesti elf.

The merchant, realizing it was the blade of a Solamnic Knight, sent word that he would deliver the blade to the High Clerists Tower within a fortnight.

The dwarf was slain by a Dragonarmy patrol before the blade could be delivered. Currently, Pathfinder may be wielded by the mysterious leader of the Red Dragonarmy in Nordmaar, or perhaps it remains undiscovered in an abandoned temple to a heathen god in Neraka, where the Dragonarmies stockpiled weapons during the War of the Lance.

Description: Pathfinder is a long sword with a white steel blade, gold plated hilt, and a cured leather handle. Both sides of the blade have the engraved design of ivy twirled around a blooming rose. On one side, in cursive, ancient Solamnic, are the names "Andrew" and "Galen." The reverse side bears the word "Agion." The hilt is engraved with ivy and the feathers of a Kingfisher, the symbol of the Solamnic Knights.

Abilities: Pathfinder is +2 to hit and damage. When used by someone of good alignment, the sharp blade bestows direction sense (as the nonweapon proficiency); if the wielder already has the direction sense proficiency, then Pathfinder grants a +2 bonus to any direction sense checks. Pathfinder's wielder is immune to spells which attempt to disguise land (such as *hallucinatory terrain*).
XP: 5,000 Value: 20,000

Ground Breaker

(aka Earthshaker, Tremor, and Thunderstrike)

Background: This war hammer was created for the minotaur Savigl by a captive wizard. The hammer was used by the minotaur as he lead a series of pirate attacks against other powerful minotaur clans. In no time, Savigl became the most powerful member of the Ocean Guilders, and he traveled to Kothas to challenge the Emperor in arena combat. A human assassin employed by the Emperor murdered Savigl prior to the combat.
The weapon then became the possession of Sakil, the eldest son of Svigl. Sakil used the wealth and resources of his father to chase the assassin from Kothas to the port town of Flotsam. Sakil and a boat load of raiders went on a destructive rampage of killing and burning until they found the assassin. The assassin's fate is unknown, but the following morning when the fires were put out, the body of Sakil was found dead, his body twisted from the blows of a huge hammer. Groundbreaker was nowhere to be found.

The hammer is then known to have somehow turned up in the possession of a barbarian tribe on the Plains of Dust. This tribe, whose name is lost to history, grew suddenly to be the most powerful in the desert, their leader wielding the powerful Groundbreaker. Almost as quickly as the tribe grew in power, it was destroyed by a raging sandstorm which lasted a full month. Because of the tragedy which has befallen the owners of the hammer, many people believe the weapon to carry a hidden curse formed by the wizard who created it.

Description: Groundbreaker is unique in that the weapon is made entirely of carved and polished white marble with black veins. The weapon is so well made that the haft and head appear to be a single piece of stone. The handle of the handle is wrapped in silver wire, and the butt is capped in gold inscribed in a little-known ancient language—this inscription is rumored to be a warning about the curse.
Abilities: Groundbreaker is a hammer +1, +2 vs. minotaurs. When struck upon the ground, it creates a tremor which causes all man-sized or smaller creatures within a 20 feet radius to save vs. spell or fall to the ground for one round.
XP: 2,000 Value: 5,000

Honor's Face

(aka Honor's Fame or Honor's Fate, due to inaccurate translation of ancient Dwarven)
(As described in *Kaz the Minotaur*, by Richard A. Knaak)

Background: Much of this ancient battle axe's history has been lost to time. What is known is that the weapon

was created by a dwarven smith as his masterpiece.

The dwarf gave the weapon to a mysterious elven wizard named Sardal Crystalthorn before going to fight in the Second Dragon War. Sardal kept the weapon for several years before finally passing it on to Kaz, the famed renegade minotaur and honorary Knight of Solamnia. Kaz held the weapon for many years. From that time, no mention of the axe appears in any history, until 150 years before the Cataclysm. Then, a group of bandits killed and robbed an old retired warrior, taking Honor's Face from him.

The thieves sold the weapon, now called Honor's Fate, to a dwarven collector. The weapon was used by the collector's son (who called it Honor's Fame) in what came to be known as the Dwarfgate War.

Since that time, no other mention of the weapon has appeared.

Description: The handle is crafted from thick oak in which the axe's name is expertly carved in ancient dwarven runes. The blades are so well polished that they reflect images like a mirror. The weapon is balanced for throwing.

Abilities: Honor's Face is known to have several special abilities beyond its +2 bonus to hit and damage.

The weapon will appear in the hand of its owner upon command, or if the owner travels more than 100 miles from the axe.

Furthermore, the mirror-like blades of the weapon reflect the images only of honorable people, typically characters of Lawful Good, Lawful Neutral, Neutral Good, or Neutral alignments, though the DM should be the final arbiter of the effect, since honor and alignment don't always go hand-in-hand.

XP: 6,000 Value: 25,500

❑

Shadowrun Archetypes

Adding Characters To FASA's Cyber-Fantasy Game

by Tom Dowd

PHYSICAL ADEPT

"I know it's the image, but I wouldn't call myself a loner. Sure, I like a certain amount of time to myself, to meditate and focus myself, but the rhythm and bounce of the sprawl energizes me. I see chaos and unending flow in every motion, every noise, every act and reaction. But within the confusion there is a pattern, too, an order of sorts out of the chaos.

"Okay, okay; so I've contributed a little to that confusion myself on more than one occasion. I consider it my duty as a humanitarian to see that things don't get boring. I also consider it my duty to see that everybody plays fair. That's the big red button for me, chummers. Play nice, and I'll stay nice too. . . ."

Commentary: The Physical Adept is a limited magician—her power is focused inward improving, enhancing, and amplifying her own natural abilities. She's barely aware of the magic, except at certain times, usually when the adrenaline is pumping and everything is on the line. Then she feels it—the power of her own, unique, magic. Though the beginning Physical Adepts tend to focus on the martial arts, any physical ability will do.

Attributes
Body: 6
Quickness: 6
Strength: 6
Charisma: 3
Intelligence: 4
Willpower: 6
Essence: 6
Magic: 6
Reaction: 5 (6)

Skills
Armed Combat: 4
Etiquette (Street): 4
Stealth: 4 (6)
Throwing: 6
Unarmed Combat: 6 (8)

Initiative: 6 +2D6

Dice Pools:
Combat: 8

Cyberware: None

Physical Adept's Abilities:
Improved Ability (Stealth +2 dice)
Improved Ability (Unarmed Combat +2 dice)
Improved Physical Senses (Low-Light vision, Acute Hearing)
Increased Reaction (+1)
Increased Reflexes (1) (+1D6 Initiative)
Killing Hands (6S Physical Damage (unarmed))

Contacts: Choose (2) Contacts

Gear:
Knife (Concealability= 8; 6L Physical damage)
Lined Coat (Concealability= 8; 4/2 armor rating)
Medkit
Portable Phone (Handset-style, Concealability= 3)
(10) Shuriken (Concealability= 8; 6L Physical damage)
Simsense Player (w/4 program chips)

Starting Cash: 11,134¥

Starting Karma Pool: 1

Starting Lifestyle: Low

Note: This is an Archetype, a sample character, created using the standard Shadowrun, Second Edition character creation rules and represents one possible way in which a Physical Adept could be created (including gender, attitude, Attributes, Skills, Adept Abilities, and Gear.) Though players are encouraged to create their own characters, the Physical Adept can be used as a starting character (with the gamemaster's permission.) Alternately, she can be used by the gamemaster as a non-player-character.

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JOHN "PICASSO" GANNET
(Ork Decker-Adept)
(NPC/Contact)

Gear:
(2) Air Filter Masks (reduces effect of pollutants, no game effect)
Armor Jacket (5/3 armor rating)
Doc Wagon™ Basic (Green) Service
Medkit

Ruger Super-Warhawk (Heavy Pistol, 6 (cylinder), SS, 10M Physical, with Laser Sight and 24 rounds of explosive ammo)
Sony CTY-360 Cyberdeck (with Response Increase (1) (+2 Reaction, +1D6 Initiative, only when in the Matrix)

Programs: Persona: Bod 4, Evasion 4, Masking 5, Sensors 5,
Utilities: Analyze 3, Attack 4, Browse 6, Decrypt 3, Medic 3, Sleaze 5

Yamaha Rapier motorcycle
Special Abilities/Notes: Allergy (Pollutants, Mild), Natural Low-Light vision.
*Physical Initiative of 6 + 2D6 and Matrix Initiative of 8 + 2D6.
Cash: 11,134¥
Lifestyle: Low

BACKGROUND: Born in 2036 to ork parents, John was raised in the street-tough Barrens of Seattle, pushed by his parents to become more than what Goblinization had forced upon them. Though larger and tougher than human boys his age, he was scrawny compared to the other orks, and the monstrous trolls, in the neighborhoods. (Even now, John doesn't fully recognize, let alone understand, the presence of his physical adept abilities. He can see little direct effect from them, other than better reflexes and reaction, but those he attributes to his smaller size rather than magic. He's been told he has a mystic gift, but isn't sure what to make of it.)

Unable to fit into any social group, he withdrew inside himself and found solace and empowerment both in postmodern industrial sculpting and assembly, and in cyberspace, the Matrix, as well. There he could be anything he wanted, appear in any form he choose, and no one. John started out as a "turtle," a Matrix slow-poke able to log-on with a cheap, discarded personal computer. But even so, as time passed, his skills and talent became evident. Coaxed by others in the Matrix, including a handful of renowned hackers he'd met, John began to build his cyberdeck (which resembles art more than electronics.) With it, he finally blossomed into a full-fledged decker, one with an edge few realize.

When John is in the Matrix, which is to say most of the time, his persona appears as a slight-of-build ork gentleman with black smock and black beret. Sculpting is his symbolism in the Matrix; he fabricates his programs with random parts pulled from under his smock, and so on. His creations are whirring, grinding, mechanistic conglomerations of industrial, mechanical, and electronic parts. Each creation, each new use of a program, results in a unique expression of his art. "Picasso" Gannet is an artist of the Matrix.

Note: Though well respected, Picasso is still a minor-leaguer in the Seattle shadow-world. He's tagged as an up-and-comer since his decking certainly seems more effective than his raw knowledge indicates. All who encounter him are startled by the emotional power of the Matrix-sculptures he creates, and are often surprised by their effectiveness as well.

John "Picasso" Gannet makes an excellent decking Contact, as well as nonplayer character than can be called upon to assist the shadowrunning team in a pinch. Remember, for a decker, he can handle himself surprisingly well in the real world.

John "Picasso" Gannet was initially created using the Shadowrun, Second Edition character creation rules, but was then enhanced to create the character here by appling advanced rules from the Grimoire, Second Edition as well. No particular rhyme or reason was used to increase or round-out his Attributes, Skills, Abilities, or Gear. ❑

Attributes
Body: 7
Quickness: 6
Strength: 5
Computer Theory: 2
Charisma: 3
Intelligence: 5
Willpower: 3
Essence: 5
Magic: 8
Reaction: 5 (6)
Initiative*: 6 (8)* +2d6 (+2d6)*

Skills
Bike: 3
Computer: 6
Electronics: 5
Etiquette (street): 2
Firearms: 4
Unarmed Combat: 6
Negotiation: 3
Sculpture Centering: 5

Threat Ratings:
Combat Threat: (7)
Hacking Threat: (5)

Professional Rating: 3 Grade of Initiation: 3

Cyberware:
Datajack
Datasoft Link
Display Link
Headware Memory (60 Mp)

Physical Adepts Abilities:
Enhanced Centering (Matrix)
Increased Reaction (+1)
Increased Reflexes (1) (+1d6 Initiative)
Pain Resistance (6)

Physical Adepts Abilities:
Improved Ability (Stealth +2 dice)
Improved Ability (Unarmed Combat +2 dice)
Improved Physical Senses (Low-Light vision, Acute Hearing)
Increased Reaction (+1)
Increased Reflexes (1) (+1D6 Initiative)
Killing Hands (6S Physical Damage (unarmed))

Contacts: Choose (2) Contacts

Pumpkin-Charley

A Tale For The RAVENLOFT® Setting

J. Robert King

How would you like a pumpkin-patch tour? Yes?
Don't be slow, and we'll go see the show
Charley makes with his cruel cruel eyes—
how they glow, how they burn with the candles that
brought Charley low all those years long ago . . .
all those years long ago.

Old Charley was stupid. He lived down the lane—
human soul, but a scarecrowlike man with no brain,
all the same, yet worse: he was scared of the night,
he was scared of the wights, he was too scared to fight
all the monsters that lurked and that worked 'neath his bed,
all the beasties that worked and that laughed in his head,
that laughed at the quirks of his hollowed-out head . . .
they laughed in his hollowed-out head.

He was scared of the spooks, Spooks, SPOOKS!—filled with dread
all his days. Yet the worst superstition of all Charley held
was a spirit he called Pumpkin-God—"Do Him Laud"—who would come
to the patch every year with the queer thought of bringing his blessings
to them who would bend there and pray that he come . . .
who bent there to pray he would come.

And fearing the boggles and beasts of his mind, of his
weak and weary and simpleton mind, Charley always
went out on that night seeking kind God of Gourds,
hoping Pumpkin would grant some reprieve from the
evil vile folk in the trees and the brush and the
closet and bed, all the grave-folk he fled, folk who
wanted poor Charley to wake one day dead, folk who
often filled silly and hollowed-out heads
with constant unutterable dread . . .
with constant, acute, and unutterable dread.

So it happened that I, nearest friend to this dolt,
thought I'd snuff out this singular light in the night
of poor Charley's unendable fright, and thereby, all at once
I would see all the demons this dunce yet believed in
be pardoned to bounce and to pounce and to trounce
the weak mind of old Chuck, to finally flay and waylay
Charley's hopes that one day he would live without fear
in this world. So the night that I chose was the night I supposed
would do most to undo my poor unthinking prey; so the night
for the fright was the night of the flight of the Pumpkin-God
o'er the patch, with the catch that this time, as poor Charley
lay groveling there, mumbling prayers, he would see in his glee
the great Pumpkin-God (me, actually, holding high a carved jack'o,
with candles for eyes). A most excellent ploy . . .
a most excellent, evil, and ungodly ploy.

Oh, surprise, Charley dear! I remember it clear,
how he knelt there with fear and a grin ear to ear
and the false hope of candlelight lighting his eyes,
and the false light of lies from that blazing jack head,
and the true supplications with which Charley pled
as he said, "Oh dear Pumpkin-God, here, free me now
from the fear that has ruled my life. Free me, Lord,
from the strife I endure from bogeys and wraiths,
from the thousand bad fates that await fearful dimwits
like me. O Lord please, I have come here this night
as I have times before, and at last you are here,
here so real, here so kind, to release me from fear.
Oh release me now here . . .
release me now here . . . now here."

So heartfelt his pleading, so lamblike the bleating
of poor Charley's supplicant voice, that right then and there
I made my own choice not to answer his call, for I
feared that my voice would then fall into laughter,
would show I was false, would give me away. Instead
I then lifted the Pumpkin-God, candle-eyes lighting
the smile and the eyes of poor Charley, of poor stupid
Charley, who thought he had seen his dear god. Now it flew
straight and true, so the Pumpkin-God's brow crashed
in blistering fire on poor Charley's pate, and the face
of the god cracked and split and then wrapped up his
empty fool-head in a pumpkin-shell blaze. He rose then
and screamed, like a cow that it seems was not killed
by the hammer's first blow, but stands there half crunched
and waits there half slumped for the maul that at last brings it low.
Poor Charley got no mercy-blow . . .
but old Chuck gave me such a good show!

He screamed and he writhed, empty head caught inside
empty godhead I'd made for a joke. His skin blistered there
and the fire caught his hair and the flames licked his frame,
his scarecrowlike frame, and they baked his poor brain,
his simpleton brain, and the strain as he gained his feet,
tripped, then, and fought and beat, grabbed up
a pitchfork and gouged at the Pumpkin-God head—
his own Pumpkin-God head—to dislodge the false hope,
the true fire, it had brought to his poor empty head . . .
it had brought to his hollowed-out head.

Even now I don't know if the dunce got free, though,
for right then I got up and I fled. My gut hurt
from laughter, from evil vile laughter, from laughter
like laughter that echoes in trees, from laughter
like laughter of one who is teased near to death—
ticklish laughter of madmen and fiends;
giggling chuckles that prickle the spleen—
the laughter that's rung round that pumpkin-patch since . . .
that's rung round that pumpkin-patch since.

But maybe we'll find out tonight if poor Charley still lives
there, his head still ablaze. So, come with me now,
when the Pumpkin-God flies o'er the gourds of his faithful,
to ease all the frights of the dimwits who hope
he will bless them tonight . . .
who hope he will bless them tonight.

And then we will see if you've less fear than me,
or poor Charley, who's lost in his head. (Be it
man-flesh or pumpkin, I will not dare to guess.) Yes,
come with me, we will see old Charley, see if
he grants us a blessing tonight . . . or if
he is yet pressing, if he's yet distressing
the false burning dressing of pumpkin rind blessing
his empty head's guessing of beasts yet expressing
their hatred of Charley who's always confessing that
he is afraid of the night!

❑

Alien Technology

The Gencenter For The Shatterzone Game

by Ed Stark

CSR Report: Filed by Hubis Arania, PPD, DS
Fleet Record: Classified, Inquiry Attached

Whether the gencenter was a product of fringer innovation or alien technology is unknown at this time. Several fringe groups have been known to utilize the gencenter, with varied results. But most Consortium researchers believe it is a creation beyond the capability of all but the finest Ishantran genetic scientists—and they have not claimed it as their own.

The name "gencenter" comes from the phrase "genetic centrifuge," not "genetic center," as most people who've heard of the apparatus believe. Perhaps this mis-translation is why the devices are still used by the ignorant and the desperate—it is the author's opinion that only an ignorant or insane persona would voluntarily enter a gencenter and allow it to be used upon him or her.

The gencenter is remarkably small, considering what it does. To the uninformed, it may look like a new coldsleep container—there is no "frost-burn" or scarring on the transparent lid, and the coffin-sized cylinder is covered with tubing and controls that appear, on the surface, similar to a coldsleep module.

A person enters the gencenter, and the lid is locked from the inside. The person can't be sedated or under the influence of drugs, for this will affect the gencenter's operation. However, an unconscious or injured person can be put inside a gencenter quite easily. The machine is then switched on by a trained operator (the character should have the medicine skill, as well as some adds in science: genetic engineering.

The container fills with an oxygenated, breathable liquid, and the machine goes to work at once. It starts pumping chemicals, catalysts, and reactants into the patient's body—compounds that actually begin to alter the genetic structure of the patient—immediately.

Every day the patient is in the gencenter, he must generate a willpower or Confidence total of 12 or higher, plus two per day. If the victim ever fails, he begins to go insane. He will lose his mind quickly, however, if he is removed before the eight-day cycle of the gencenter concludes. The choice is either to remove the patient early and leave him a gibbering idiot, or to leave him in and hope he suffers only minor schizophrenia, paranoia, or mania. The earlier and more often the patient fails his check, the more severe the mental illnesses will be.

In addition to the mental check, there is a physical one as well. The character generates an Endurance total versus a DN of 12. Again, the DN increases by two for every day after the first—though if the patient is removed early, there are no physical ill effects.

If the character gains a good or better success on his Endurance roll, he should gain one physical "special ability," as defined by the gamemaster. There is no predicting what ability the character will gain. It could be a +1 to one of his physical attributes, or it might be a wholly new ability, like the ability to breath water. The changes at the beginning of the gencenter process are usually minor—the last few days could see the patient completely changed from his old form.

But there are dangers here as well. If the character does not gain a good or better success on his endurance roll, he gains a "side effect." Generally, the side effect is relatively harmless, but inconvenient. The character's skin might change to an unusual color, or he might shrink five centimeters in height (though that is pretty mild), or he could become colorblind. In this case, early effects are the worst.

If the patient fails his Endurance check, he's in real trouble. He will gain a powerful disadvantage. He might swell to enormous size, but lose multiple Agility and Dexterity points. His skin could turn rigid and tough, giving him a Toughness bonus, but he might be covered with hideous scars and lumps, decreasing his Charisma terribly. He might come out of the container blind, deaf, and dumb.

Generally, the deformities caused by the gencenter are not immediately life-threatening, but they should be more terrible than the possible benefits are good. Those who use the gencenters hope for greatness—all they usually get is tragedy. ❑

Illustration by Brian Shomberg

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Troubleshooter Exam

A Quiz For The Paranoia Game

Provided by the office of PLC and Mind Control. This form is approved for use by all potential Troubleshooters.

Instructions: Use a number two pencil. Fill out all sections completely. All sections must be filled out completely by using a black or blue pen.

Name: 1 2 3 4 5 6
(circle clone number)
Service Group:
Favorite beverage:
Why?:
What's wrong with _____?
(Please fill in the name of a beverage you don't like)

Section One: True or False
Mark either True or False to all of the following statements.

1.	The Computer is my best friend.	T	F
2.	The Computer is incapable of making a mistake.	T	F
3.	The Computer is my best friend.	T	F
4.	I am planning to register my mutant power.	T	F
5.	I am no longer involved with any Communist plots to destroy Alpha Complex.	T	F
6.	I am no longer plotting against The Computer.	T	F
7.	The best way to get ahead in Alpha Complex is to terminate superiors.	T	F
8.	I often fantasize about dressing in clothes of a higher security clearance.	T	F
9.	Soap-chewing is a waste of Computer resources.	T	F

Section Two: Short Answer
Complete the following sentences. Penmanship and grammar count.

1. When I was first contacted by a Secret Society, I

_____

2. The only thing I enjoy more than blowing up Computer property is

_____

3. When I hear the words "Workers of the world unite," I

_____

4. I feel that Secret societies are good for Alpha Complex because

_____

5. The only thing I enjoy more than a walk Outside is

_____

Section Three: Multiple Choice
Place a mark in the box which corresponds to the most correct answer. Fill in the box completely.

1. The three things a Troubleshooter must do are: Trust no one, keep his laser handy and. . . .

A. All Hail Marx and Lennon
B. Chew Soap
C. Trust no one
D. All of the above

2. When R&D equipment fails in your group, whose fault is it?

A. My fault
B. R&D's fault
C. The Computer's fault
D. It was some Commie-Mutant Scum who mind controlled me into taking apart the Tac-Nuke pistol

3. Which of the following words fits logically into this sequence? Traitor, Mutant, Commie, ...

A. Computer
B. Me
C. Blast 'em!
D. Role-playing game company employee

4. When you think of The Computer, what crosses your mind?

A. Happy happy, joy joy!
B. All you have to lose are your chains.
C. One clone down, five to go.
D. Hmmm . . . I wonder how it runs Windows?

5. What should you do if you see a citizen acting in a suspicious manner?

A. Shoot him
B. Fire a few warning shots into the crowd nearby, then shoot him.
C. Call R&D and request a tac-nuke grenade, pull the pin, throw it at him and then shoot him when it fails to work.
D. Call in a Vulture Squadron air strike of the entire sector.

Section Four: Math Questions
Solve the following math problems. Please show all work.

1. The Computer announces that 2+2=5. If this is true, what does 4+4 equal?

2. If the value of PI is equal to 3.14285714285. . . and the diameter of a circle is 7", which flavor of Pie would you like and what sort of beverage?

3. If A is equal to "A Horse"
B is equal to "is a horse,"
C is equal to "of course, of course."
What is the sum of "A Horse is a horse, of course, of course"?

4. A Vulture Warrior is crushing your skull with 400 pounds of pressure per square inch. If your skull can withstand this sort of pressure for only three seconds, how many plasticreds should you offer him to let go of you?

5. A Troubleshooter sprays a crowd of clones of various security clearances with a gatling machine laser. If the crowd consists of 23 Red clones, 9 Yellow clones, 7 Green clones and 22 Blue clones, what is the percentage chance that the machine laser will malfunction and kill the Troubleshooter?

Answer Key: This is Paranoia, there are no right or wrong answers, just ones which will get a Clone killed. Waste anyone whose answer annoys you. ❑

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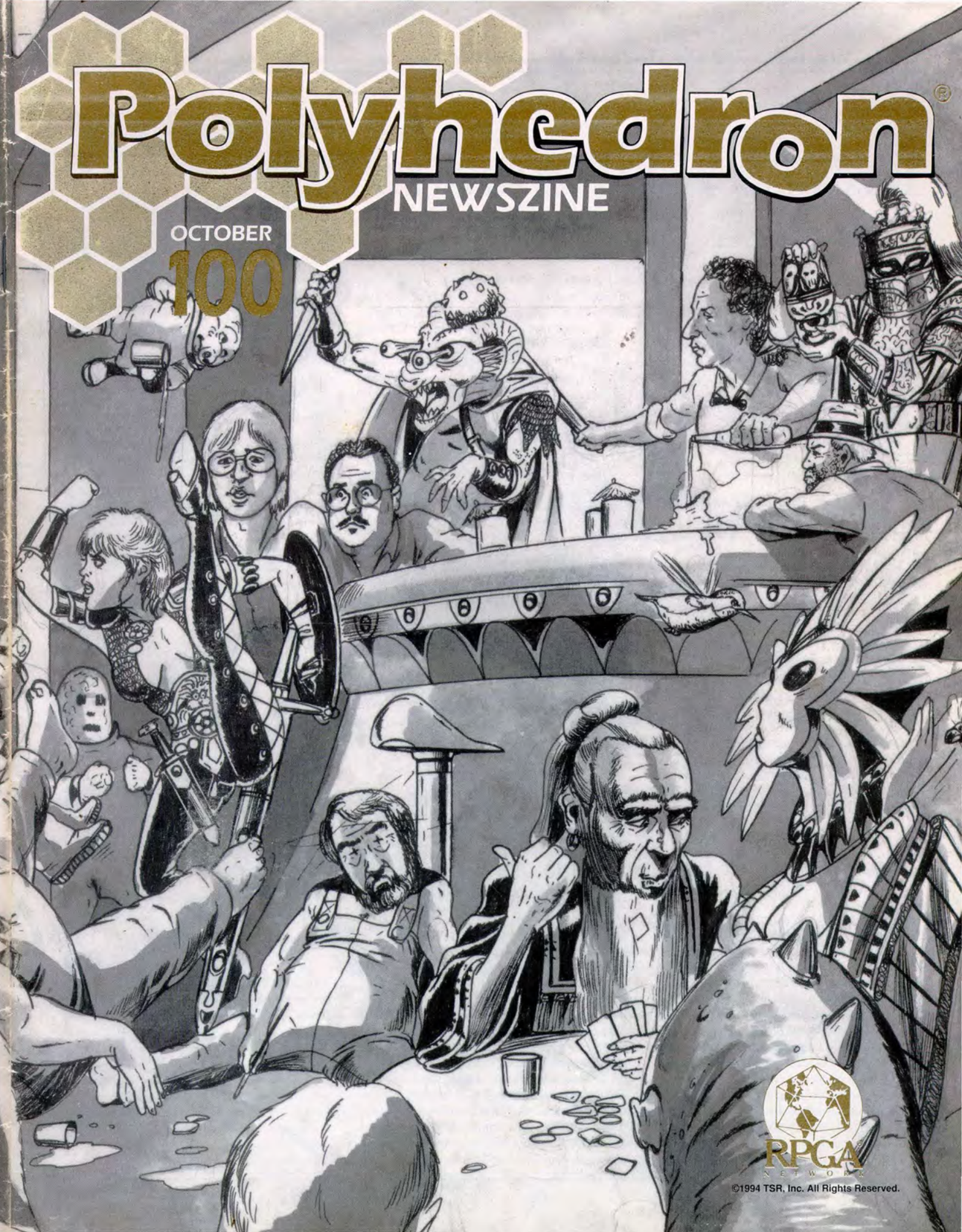

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